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## DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE/MA THESIS

SPIRITUAL ANARCHY IN EMERSON: THE INFINITUDE OF THE PRIVATE  
MAN

DUCHOVNÍ ANARCHIE U EMERSONA: NEKONEČNOST SOUKROMÉHO  
ČLOVĚKA

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I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prague,

21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012

## ABSTRACT (EN)

### Spiritual Anarchy in Emerson: The Infinitude of the Private Man

The central focus of the thesis is a critical study of anarchistic ideas vital and alive in the major literary works of R. W. Emerson. Included in the thesis is a general layout of the history and major figures of anarchism as well as its definitions, bearing in mind the fact that anarchy is indeed a broad river with as many diverse streams and currents as there are individuals striving for freedom. I explore the common ground between Emersonian ideas and Eastern mysticism and Greek thought to establish the central anarchistic themes present and their relevance thereof. Throughout the history of human kind individual needs, values and aspirations inevitably clash against the restrictive norms of the society and state. Yet, although the outcries defending freedom have been solitary, its energy and genius have aroused the appraisal of many whose longing for liberation has not been down-trodden with social estrangements; among such was Henry David Thoreau who in turn played out the intellectually and spiritually sophisticated insights of Emerson into the practical experience of everyday living and being. His insistence on a simple and fulfilling life, bereft of materialistic concerns and hindrances, in complete harmony with nature, made him a sober example and inspiration for the generations of activists, ecologists and philosophers to come. In conclusion, I show that the spiritual anarchy of Emerson can be perceived as a state of mind, or rather a state of being, with the implication that the true authority is to be found within, that the real revolution happens inside in terms of a perpetual evolution and transformation of individual consciousness.

## ABSTRAKT (SK)

### Duchovná anarchia u Emersona: Nekonečnosť súkromného/vnútorneho života človeka

Táto diplomová práca sa sústreďuje na kritický výskum anarchistických ideí, prítomných v hlavných literárnych dielach R. W. Emersona. Súčasťou práce je všeobecný prehľad dejín a hlavných osobností anarchizmu ako aj jeho definície. Zohľadňujem pritom skutočnosť, že anarchizmus v podstate predstavuje široký prúd s množstvom rozmanitých podprúdov, toľkých, koľko je rôznorodých jednotlivcov bojujúcich za slobodu. Práca cielene skúma, hľadá spoločné východiská medzi Emersonovými ideami/myšlienkami, východným mysticizmom a gréckou filozofiou v snahe uviesť prítomné zásadné anarchistické témy a ich relevanciu. V priebehu celých dejín človečenstva sa potreby, hodnoty a aspirácie jednotlivca nevyhnutne dostávali do konfliktu s obmedzujúcimi pravidlami spoločnosti a štátu. Hoci zápas na obranu slobody bol vecou osamelých jednotlivcov, jeho energia a duch vyvolávali ocenenie mnohých, ktorých túžba po oslobodení nebola pošliapaná spoločenským odcudzením. Medzi nich patril Henry David Thoreau, ktorý uplatňoval Emersonove intelektuálne a duchovne sofistikované myšlienky v praktickej skúsenosti každodenného života a bytia. Jeho neústupčivé volanie po jednoduchom a naplnenom živote, zbaveného materialistických starostí a prekážok, v plnom súlade s prírodou, vytvorili z neho trpezlivý príklad a inšpiráciu pre nastupujúce generácie aktivistov, ekologov a filozofov. V záverečnej časti práce poukazujem na to, že Emersonova duchovná anarchia môže byť vnímaná ako stav mysle, resp. skôr ako stav bytia. Z toho vyplýva, že skutočnú autoritu je potrebné nájsť v samom sebe, že pravá revolúcia sa deje v ľudskom vnútri v podobe permenantnej evolúcie a transformácie individuálneho vedomia.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Emerson's American Republic

On one of R.W. Emerson's trips through Europe in the summer of 1848, Emerson spent considerable time with his much admired friend, English writer, Thomas Carlyle, discussing, amongst other things the futures of their respective nations. During one such occasion, accompanied by the prominent writer and political figure, Arthur Helps, it is recorded that Emerson was specifically asked whether "there were any persons in America who had a true vision for the future of the country."<sup>1</sup> We find that this was later written in his journal:

I thought only of the simplest and purest minds; I said, "Certainly yes;-but those who hold it are fanatics of a dream which I should hardly care to relate to your English ears, to which it might be only ridiculous,-and yet it is the only truth". So I opened the dogma of no-government and non-resistance, and anticipated the objections and the fun, and procured a kind of hearing for it...-and 'tis certain, as God liveth, the gun that does not need another gun, that law of love and justice, can alone effect a clean revolution.<sup>2</sup>

In the work of Emerson, this vision of a society, nation or world, run by self-reliant individuals and in effect, of a ruler-less structure is rarely so exclusively handed to the reader. Yet one finds hints of the potential of man to lead a life of "true independence" practically in every page of his writing. His essays are steeped with the eternal process of man's becoming, as if secretly anticipating the stage in human evolution when people finally cease to resist change, and obeying the laws of nature and their own minds, generate a 'clean revolution' based on 'that law of love and justice'.

This thesis, then, is an investigation into Emerson's exploration of the human condition and self-authentication as well as his essential influence on his close companion H.D. Thoreau who found unique ways of carrying out in practice the challenging ideals of self-reliance. It is also an investigation into the timeless and indestructible notion of freedom present throughout the ages, culminating here as Anarchy, and elsewhere as the burning passion for inner awakening and liberation, which, Emerson and Thoreau, as well as other 'truth seeking' libertarians and individuals, were eager to explore and experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Geldard, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 150

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Chapter Two deals exclusively with anarchistic ideas present and alive in the ancient spiritual teachings, namely, Taoism, Buddhism and Greek thought. Chapter Three shows anarchy in the broader context of its short comings to establish itself as functional political movements and how it can be compared with general libertarianism. Chapter four deals essentially with the political ideas of Emerson's and Thoreau's thought while Chapter five draws attention almost exclusively to the path of inner awakening, which, conclusively, opens the doors to the freedom which anarchists so desire in their political systems. Finally, Chapter six, shows the ways in which Thoreau sincerely lived out the ideals of self-reliance and self-actualization, and came thus to directly influence some of the most brilliant political and spiritual activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi and the extensive ecophilosophy and deep-ecology movements.

This work is thus a deliberate probing in the depth of the human condition with the intention to explore and investigate whether it is at all possible to validate, as Geldard summarized, that "Emerson's American Republic was to be governed by the visionary sensibility."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Geldard, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 151

## CHAPTER TWO: THE VALUE OF LIBERTY

### 2. I What is Anarchy? Who is the Anarchist – Fiend or Saint?

Anarchy is terror, the creed of bomb-throwing desperadoes wishing to pull down civilization. Anarchy is chaos, when law and order collapse and the destructive passions of man run riot. Anarchy is nihilism, the abandonment of all moral values and the twilight of reason. This is the spectre of anarchy that haunts the judge's bench and the government cabinet. In the popular imagination, in our everyday language, anarchy is associated with destruction and disobedience...It is usual to dismiss its ideal of pure liberty at best as utopian, at worst as a dangerous chimera. Anarchists are dismissed as subversive madmen, inflexible extremists, dangerous terrorists on the one hand, or as naïve dreamers and gentle saints on the other.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, contrary to the popular opinion that often associates it with unruly violence, anarchy is an expression of a timeless longing for ultimate freedom, of self-actualization and of the trust in one's individual potential of self-governance. Although anarchy means different things to different people, it can be best described as a society without government. According to the dictionary, the word 'anarchy' comes from the Greek 'anarchía', derived from 'ánarchos', meaning 'rulerless' (an- without + 'archós' ruler) while the word 'anarchist' was probably formed in English from the earlier 'anarch', meaning a leader of revolt, borrowed from the Greek 'ánarchos'.<sup>5</sup> Anarchism is a serious moral and social philosophy which opposes all hierarchies, rejects any imposed political authority and condemns domination of man over man in whatever form. Albeit a relatively young science, the ideas of anarchism are as ancient as man's desire to be free. Its roots can be found in Taoism, Zen Buddhism and in philosophies of Hindu sages, Greek stoics and Christian mystics. Throughout the literary, political and social history of human kind we find numerous anarchistic thinkers, writers and activists who with great courage and insight opposed and challenged corruption and tyranny of authoritarian states and governments all over the world.

Therefore, it is not surprising that anarchism has received a bad reputation; it poses a very definite and real threat to the authority it seeks to overthrow and a lot of effort has gone into the propaganda to demonize, ridicule and discredit it. President Roosevelt was known to declare: "Anarchism is a crime against the whole human race and all mankind should band against

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, p. ix

<sup>5</sup> *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, p. 32

anarchists.”<sup>6</sup> According to Peter Marshall “it is easy to see why rulers should fear anarchy and wish to label anarchists as destructive fanatics for they question the very foundations of their rule.”<sup>7</sup> Marshall’s book *Demanding the Impossible* is a thorough and exhaustive study of anarchistic philosophy that presents a comprehensive historical review of the key concepts and major figures of anarchism from the times of antiquity to the present. Nonetheless, Marshall is much aware that to propose a clear cut definition would be difficult:

It would be misleading to offer a neat definition of anarchism, since by its very nature it is anti-dogmatic. It does not offer a fixed body of doctrine based on one particular world-view. It is a complex and subtle philosophy, embracing many different currents of thought and strategy. Indeed anarchy is like a river with many currents and eddies, constantly changing and being refreshed by new surges but always moving towards the wide ocean of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

Volumes have been written to answer the question ‘what exactly is anarchism?’ and millions of people have dedicated their lives to creating, expanding, defining, and fighting for anarchy. “Peter Gelderloos, who in his book *Anarchy Works* examines the practicality of anarchism today, writes “there are countless paths to anarchism and countless beginnings: workers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe fighting against capitalism and believing themselves instead of the ideologies of authoritarian political parties; indigenous peoples fighting colonization and reclaiming their traditional, horizontal cultures; high school students waking up to the depth of their alienation and unhappiness; women rebelling against authoritarianism and sexism of the Left. There is no Central Committee giving out the membership cards, and no standard doctrine. Anarchy means different things to different people.”<sup>9</sup>

For the purpose of this work, however, I believe anarchy can be best understood and examined in the light of the libertarian tradition, richly endowed with names such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Stuart Mill, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, William Blake, Oscar Wilde, Aldous Huxley, Noam Chomsky, Albert Camus, Michel Foucault and many others. Striving for freedom is a natural instinct and represents a deeply human experience; ever since the dawn of mankind individual liberty has been of foremost value to the extent as to be

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<sup>6</sup> Theodore Roosevelt quoted by Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. ix

<sup>7</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. x

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gelderloos, *Anarchy Works*, p. 2

considered a natural birthright. “It is an attitude, a way of life as well as a social philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> The initial stages of anarchistic consciousness can be felt in surprisingly radical and relevant ideas of the philosophies of ancient civilizations - these are indeed the true forerunners of anarchism; let us briefly examine the development anarchistic ideas throughout early history as these pioneering insights will prove intrinsically relevant in later chapters for the discussion of the libertarian philosophy of R. W. Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

## 2. 2 Anarchy in Antiquity

### 2. 2. 1 Taoism

Anarchism is usually considered a recent, Western phenomenon, but its roots reach deep in the ancient civilizations of the East. The first clear expression of an anarchistic sensibility may be traced back to the Taoists in ancient China from about sixth century BC. Indeed, the principal Taoist work, the *Tao Te Ching*, may be considered one of the greatest anarchistic classics.<sup>11</sup>

In ancient China two entirely different philosophical systems emerged: Taoism and Confucianism. Their respective founders, Lao Tzu and Confucius, were contemporaries. Taoism represented an egalitarian feminine viewpoint from the past (the yin principle) while Confucianism emphasized masculine dominance and became the creed of the future (the yang principle). Both were humanistic, practical guides to living and both believed that “human beings have an innate predisposition to goodness which is revealed in the instinctive reaction of anyone who sees a child falling into a well.”<sup>12</sup> Confucianism rested on a hierarchical ordering of the world; its foundation was the family. It upheld the ideal of a stable, harmonious social order in which everyone knew their place and every aspect of life was subject to clear rules of behavior.

In contrast to the worldliness and rigid discipline of Confucians, Taoists were interested in a more spiritual level of being; they celebrated nature and advocated a return to simplicity and harmony with the natural world. The central concept of Taoism, the ideal was ‘wu-wei’, no doing or non-action, which is not intent upon result and is not concerned with deliberate good works or

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<sup>10</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. xv

<sup>11</sup> John Clark, “Master Lao and the Anarchist Prince”, quoted in *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 53

<sup>12</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 53

consciously laid plans. If one was in harmony with the Tao, the ‘Cosmic Way’, the answer would make itself clear when action was called for, and then one would not act according to deliberate and pre-conceived ways but according to the divine and spontaneous mode of wu-wei, which is the mode of action of the Tao itself.

The Tao, or the Way, is celebrated in the *Tao Te Ching* written by Lao Tzu most probably around the third century BC. *Tao Te Ching* is a series of insights into life and nature; it is suggestion rather than statement. The text consists of eighty-one short chapters in poetic form and is characterized by a boldness and exuberance of expression for which the paradox is the only adequate form. Here, Lao Tzu transformed the mystery of the feminine into his enigmatic rendering of the Tao using primarily the metaphor of horizontally flowing water:

The great Tao flows everywhere, both to the left and the right. The ten thousand things depend upon it; it holds nothing back. It fulfills its purpose silently and makes no claim.<sup>13</sup>

The Tao, Lao Tzu explained, is the natural flow of movement that goes on all around us. It is the all-embracing, all-encompassing, all-governing, ever present principle of natural laws of the universe. The universal interconnectedness in the world anticipates the essential Taoist belief: the entire visible universe is the emanation of the Tao and the human body is a reflection of the universe. “The Tao of humanity and that of the universe are one, and in this lies the key to a completely satisfying and harmonious human existence.”<sup>14</sup> Because we have layered our world with artificial categories we have obscured the Tao. If we simply let fall the veils of cultural conventions we will grasp our place in its flow. Since every cell and fiber making up our physical bodies is part of the Tao, every one of us is like seaweed gently waving to and fro in the current. Living our lives in this natural rhythm, and making no effort to resist it, would allow everything – from our institutions and governments to gender relations – to float gently along as part of this river of the Way. Embosomed in the Tao, everything flows, all things are in a constant flux and everything changes continuously.

Nature is self-sufficient and uncreated; there is no need to postulate a conscious creator. It is a view which not only recalls that of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus but coincides with the description of the universe presented by modern physics. Modern social ecology,

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<sup>13</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English, ch. 34

<sup>14</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 360

which stresses unity in diversity, organic growth and natural order, further reflects the Taoist world-view.<sup>15</sup>

Because the Tao is nameless and formless, it cannot be defined. Lao Tzu's first precept is that language is the great barrier that prevents us from knowing the Way. The opening couplet of *Tao te ching* warns: "The Tao that can be told (or named) is not the eternal (or real) Tao./The name that can be named is not the eternal name."<sup>16</sup> Later Lao Tzu observes: "Those who know do not talk/Those who talk do not know."<sup>17</sup> "Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking."<sup>18</sup> Silence, in other words, is the precondition of wisdom. The Tao transcends rational thought. Knowledge, according to Lao Tzu, is not the same as wisdom. For the Taoists reality is beyond measurement but not beyond apprehension by a mind that is still; intuition is the key, healthy introspection a prerogative: "More words count less./Hold fast to the center"<sup>19</sup>, urges Lao Tzu; it is quintessential to look within oneself, deep down inside and discover one's true nature.

Written codes of laws were a bane to Lao Tzu. He points out that as the number of laws increases so, too, do the number of rascals. If each person managed to enter stream of the Tao, there would be no need for lawyers or laws. "The world is ruled by letting things take their course./It cannot be ruled by interfering."<sup>20</sup> A wise ruler, faced with a crisis, would not try to reform society. Any action would constitute interference. Rather, he would rededicate his own life to the way of the Tao and thus, the entire community would be in synchrony; strife would be silenced by harmony:

The more laws and restrictions there are,/The poorer people become. The sharper men's weapons,/The more trouble in the land./The more ingenious and clever men are,/The more strange things happen./The more rules and regulations,/The more thieves and robbers./Therefore the sage says:/I take no action and people are reformed./I enjoy peace and people become honest./I do nothing and the people become rich./I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.<sup>21</sup>

Recommending a natural life of simplicity and humility, Lao Tzu sees private property as a form of theft; the following chapter resonates with strong social criticism: "When the court is arrayed in splendor,/The fields are full of weeds,/And the granaries are bare./Some wear gorgeous clothes,/Carry sharp swords,/And indulge themselves with food and drink;/they have

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<sup>15</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 55

<sup>16</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, ch. 1

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 56

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 2

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 5

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 48

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 57

more possessions than they can use./They are robber barons./This is certainly not the way of Tao.”<sup>22</sup>

Reading between the lines of *Tao Te Ching* it becomes clear that Lao Tzu clearly proposes that a government that governs least governs best, thus foreshadowing Thomas Jefferson and many later libertarians and anarchists by over twenty hundred years. He advocates a laissez-faire stance towards economic activity trusting that the natural industry and self-reliance of citizenry will always correct distortions introduced by intrusive government. Thus, Lao Tzu in essence rejects all private property as well as any kind of dominion, power or supremacy; the following quote could be indeed read as the first anarchistic manifesto: “Therefore all things arise from Tao./By virtue they are nourished,/Developed, cared for./Sheltered, comforted./ Grown and Protected./Creating without claiming,/Doing without taking credit,/Guiding without interfering,/This is Primal Virtue.”<sup>23</sup> It is obviously no coincidence that the chapter’s most relevant last three lines “Production without possession, action without self-assertion, development without domination”<sup>24</sup> appeared on the title page of the book *Roads to Freedom* by the modern libertarian Bertrand Russell.

The later Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu in his essay “On Letting Alone” developed the idea of non-resistance even further; he advocated letting people be themselves and to rely on their own resources, using the horse analogy: left to themselves – horses behave according to their natural dispositions, following harmony and spontaneous order, however, once dominated and interfered with – they become vicious and depraved.

(Chuang Tzu) asserted three hundred years before Christ the fundamental proposition of anarchistic thought which has reverberated through history ever since: ‘There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind. Letting alone springs from fear lest men’s natural dispositions be perverted and their virtue left aside. But if their natural dispositions be not perverted nor their virtue laid aside, what room is there left for government?’<sup>25</sup>

The concept/idea of wu-wei is sometimes translated as ‘actionless activity’, however, non-resistance does not mean doing nothing. It cannot be likened to inactivity in an ordinary state of consciousness. True ‘doing nothing’ means inner non-resistance and implies an alertness

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<sup>22</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, ch. 53

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 51

<sup>24</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, ch. 51, quoted by Bertrand Russell on the title page of *Roads to Freedom*

<sup>25</sup> Chuang Tzu, “On Letting Alone”, quoted in *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 59

which may serve as a powerful proponent for the transformation of consciousness. This state of intense presence was in ancient China regarded as one of the highest achievements or virtues; once the mind is still and free from attachments - observing through deep concentration the natural phenomena which are inner demonstrations of the Tao - it then becomes possible to perceive the Tao itself and find enlightenment:

Empty yourself of everything./Let the mind rest at peace./The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return./They grow and flourish and then return to the source./Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature... With an open mind, you will be openhearted./Being openhearted, you will act royally./Being royal, you will attain the divine.<sup>26</sup>

Marshall notes interesting philological similarities between the words ‘anarchism’ and ‘wu-wei’: “Just as ‘anarchía’ in Greek means absence of a ruler, ‘wu-wei’ means lack of ‘wei’, where ‘wei’ refers to ‘artificial, contrived activity that interferes with natural and spontaneous development’. From a political point of view, ‘wei’ refers to the imposition of authority. To do something in accordance with ‘we-wei’ is therefore considered natural; it leads to natural and spontaneous order. It has nothing to do with all forms of imposed authority.”<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2.2 Buddhism

Like Taoism, Buddhism is an antiauthoritarian philosophy with a strong anarchistic tendency. Buddhism was born in India toward the end of the sixth century BC and was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha (the enlightened one). The Buddha emphasized the doctrine of equality. To the Buddha there were no chosen people, no privileged castes, no divine rights of kings. His liberating universal message was that each individual, through intense personal work, could attain enlightenment, just as he himself had done. He was, he told his disciples, a mere mortal who had discovered a great truth. He claimed that religious hierarchies were designed to benefit only priests and believed that all laws imposed by an authority eventually degenerate into tyranny. While he never proposed dismantling the hierarchical caste

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<sup>26</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, ch. 16

<sup>27</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 55



system in India, he offended the Brahmin priests by making his teachings available to anyone. In his book *Zen Keys* Thich Nhat Hanh writes;

The rise of Buddhism in India must be considered a new vision of humanity and life. This vision was expounded first as a reaction against the Brahmanic practices and beliefs that dominated the society of the time...Buddhism was thoroughly opposed to absolute Vedic authority and to all the points of views stemming from it. From the standpoint of belief, Buddhism rejected all deisms and all forms of sacrifice. From the social point of view, Buddhism combated the caste system, accepting untouchables in the order at the same level as a king...<sup>28</sup>

Buddhism is a doctrine of insight and understanding as well as a doctrine of change and impermanence. The cause of human suffering, the Buddha taught, is because everything changes; everyone lives in a fleeting, transitory world but all refuse to admit it. People cling to that which is impermanent: fame, money, youth, health, fortune, reputation, and ultimately, life itself, are all subject to decay and permutation. The root of suffering, found in our constant wanting and craving, would cease with the liberation from these desires which reflect the illusory nature of our everyday existence. Once the veil of ignorance is lifted we would be able to see the true reality. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes, that “according to Buddhism, we only reach reality through direct experience.”<sup>29</sup>

In Zen, a far-east form of Buddhism, approaching direct experience becomes more radical, if only to rid the process of awakening of any unnecessary mental obstructions. Its essence consists in a total immersion into the present moment, insofar as being utterly present implies that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not who one really is in essence, is able to survive.

Zen Master and highly acclaimed Buddhist scholar of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, D.T.Suzuki, writes that what we are looking for is “essentially an affirmative attitude towards all things that exist; it accepts them as they come along regardless of their moral values.”<sup>30</sup> We dwell in silence and practice observing the myriads of fleeting phenomena as they come and go. Yet it is by no means a silence or stillness of inactivity, fixity, or idleness. Suzuki insists that it is rather a state “which appears as if always looking into eternity”<sup>31</sup>, and warns: “Woe unto those who take it for

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<sup>28</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, pp. 36-37

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 42

<sup>30</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 122

<sup>31</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *An introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 35

decadence and death, for they will be overwhelmed by an overwhelming outburst of activity out of the eternal silence.”<sup>32</sup>

This overwhelming outburst of activity is of course what the Zen masters called *satori*, describing a flash of insight, a moment of no-mind and total presence. Satori is not a lasting transformation but it gives one a taste of enlightenment; many of us have perhaps – overcome by the natural beauty during a walk in the woods – experienced a fleeting moment of the complete immersion with nature when all of a sudden time seems to stop and one feels a glorious and harmonious oneness with the whole universe which is beyond time, beyond concepts, beyond any kind of conventional morality. The full blown force of Zen thus consists in the attainment of this direct experience of unmediated reality which transcends time and the dual state of human consciousness: “It is a direct and perfect knowledge of reality, a form of understanding in which one does not distinguish between subject and object.”<sup>33</sup> Suzuki elaborates further upon the vivid experience of satori:

The individual shell in which my personality is so solidly encased explodes at the moment of satori. Not, necessarily, that I get unified with a being greater than myself or absorbed in it, but that my individuality, which I found rigidly held together and definitely kept separate from other individual existences, becomes loosened somehow from its tightening grip and melts away into something indescribable-the feeling that one has arrived finally at the destination.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, Zen is in its basic nature experiential, pragmatic and thoroughly anti-authoritarian: Zen Master Lin Chi once said: “If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha. If you meet the Patriarch, kill the Patriarch.”<sup>35</sup> According to Thich Nhat Hanh, what this essentially shocking statement purports is that we must be able to free ourselves from all authority, all preconceived ideas, all concepts in order to realize ultimate reality in ourselves. “Truth is not a concept. If we cling to our concepts, we lose reality. This is why it is necessary to ‘kill’ our concepts so that reality can reveal itself. To kill the Buddha is the only way to see the Buddha. Any concept we have of the Buddha can impede us from seeing the Buddha in person.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, one of the fundamental cornerstones of Buddhism is non-violence; the Buddha taught compassion for all sentient beings, the teaching based on the essential oneness of all

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<sup>32</sup> *An introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 36

<sup>33</sup> *Zen Keys*, p. 43

<sup>34</sup> *Zen Buddhism*, p. 123

<sup>35</sup> Lin Chi, quoted in *Zen Keys*, p. 53

<sup>36</sup> *Zen Keys*, pp. 53-54

things: being part of an organic whole, it is ourselves we hurt if we hurt others. The idea of the interconnected universe represents the basis of ancient Eastern philosophy which was revealed in the Taoist principle of the unity of humanity and universe, as well as in the Indian Upanishads: “As is the human body, so is the cosmic body. As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind. As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm. As is the atom, so is the Universe.”<sup>37</sup>

Buddhism, particularly in its Zen form, thus has, like Taoism, a strong libertarian spirit. Both reject hierarchy and domination. Both seek growth in self-disciplined freedom and assert that all are capable of enlightenment. Both are concerned with personal autonomy and social well-being. They recognize that each person is not only part of society, but of organic nature itself, as many modern anarchists in the West recognize. The voluntary poverty, compassionate harmlessness, and love of life and beauty of the greatest practitioners of Taoism and Buddhism offer a sound moral base for a free society. Above all, the vision of social freedom makes them a major source of the anarchistic sensibility, which if properly understood, must pose a profound threat to any existing State and Church.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.2.3 The Greeks

Beginning with Socrates the anarchistic tendency in Greek culture and philosophy is prevalent throughout, and most pronounced in the philosophies of the Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans. But even before, as early as the fifth century BC, anarchistic consciousness was emerging ancient Greece and reflected in the ideas Heraclitus from Ephesus. Simultaneously with the Taoists and Buddhists, he saw the world essentially always in flux where nothing is constant, lasting or permanent but continuously changing, passing and transitory - using the same metaphor like Lao Tzu of perpetually flowing water to illustrate the fluid reality and basic impermanence in the world around us. According to Marshall, “he is the first philosopher in the Western tradition to anticipate the anarchist belief that constant change takes place within a natural order.”<sup>39</sup> His teachings were immortalized by Plato’s famous comparison ‘Panta Rhei’

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<sup>37</sup> *The Upanishads*, quoted in *The Little Zen Companion*, p. 219

<sup>38</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 65

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67

(‘everything flows’) and by Cratylus’ equally popular saying: “You cannot step twice in the same river.”<sup>40</sup>

With Socrates the Greek anarchistic consciousness fully opens and blossoms. The starting-point of the philosophy of Socrates is represented in the old Greek maxim “Know thyself”<sup>41</sup> and his primary guiding principle was reason. His teachings were based on dialogue in which Socrates followed the elenctic method of leading a student towards realization of truth by his own inner logic. “The case for Socrates as a libertarian is founded on his insistence that one should question authority and think for oneself.”<sup>42</sup> He firmly believed that a philosopher does not serve any political regime. In the end, he was condemned to death for his non-conformity and the dignified composure and serenity with which he accepted his sentence and drank his cup of poison in the circle of his friends was the last expression of his philosophy that was always in concordance with his life.

After the death of Socrates a great number of philosophical schools was founded, among which the most important were the Epicureans, the Cynics and the Stoics. They “were extreme individualists for whom the state counted a little; they celebrated the natural authority of the individual over that of the State.”<sup>43</sup> The founder of the Cynical school was Antisthenes whose philosophy was based on the idea of self-reliance and individual autonomy. The ideal was the natural and liberated life without private property, without social ties and commitments, without governments.

His pupil Diogenes of Sinope, perhaps the most remarkable and best known of the Cynics, was a great libertarian, rebel and non-conformist. “Like the Taoists, Diogenes condemned the artificial encumbrances of civilization. He decided to live like a ‘dog’, and therefore was called a ‘cynic’ which means ‘canine’.”<sup>44</sup> Like his teacher before him Diogenes advocated the life of simplicity, openness and self-reliance; his ethic was “not just one of self-sufficiency, but more one of self-mastery born of a healthy contempt for one’s own pleasures and pains, and especially born out of impatience with the conventions and hierarchies of a presumably corrupt society: ‘Aristotle breakfasts when it pleases the king; Diogenes, when it

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<sup>40</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 66

<sup>41</sup> “Gnothi se auton” – the inscription found on the temple at Delphi; a profound rebuke to those who think they can gain wisdom without this component. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 152

<sup>42</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 67

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

pleases Diogenes.”<sup>45</sup> Being a follower of Socrates, he saw the fundamental human mission in reason and like Socrates he manifested his philosophy by his own life; he was completely indifferent to wealth and luxury and chose voluntary poverty, thus fulfilling the basic requirement of simplicity embodied in his humble dwelling – a barrel. He also rejected the institution of slavery and out of provocation he let himself be sold as a slave only to reverse the order because, given his intellectual and moral superiority, he eventually became the master of the man who had bought him. He had no respect whatsoever for authorities, governments, or borders. As a true libertarian Diogenes was a cosmopolitan – he called himself a ‘citizen of the world’.

Stoicism was the most influential as well as the longest lasting of Hellenic schools of philosophy. The Stoic philosophers continued in the tradition of the Cynics and followed its basic principles and requirements of simplicity; they celebrated a natural and virtuous life, free from materialistic concerns; they scorned riches and rejected all man-made laws and governments. However, the Stoics went even further and “found in the law of nature a guide which is prior and superior to all human customs and written laws. They looked beyond civil society to the world of universals in nature. In so doing, they reached anarchistic conclusions, developing the ideals of individualism, rationalism, equality, internationalism and cosmopolitanism.”<sup>46</sup>

The most important Stoics are Zeno of Citium, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. The fundamental requirement of stoic ethics is the life in complete harmony with the natural world as well as with one’s own nature, namely reason, for the core belief of the Stoics is that God is present, or immanent in all created things. The divine element, ‘pneuma’, “the spirit, force, or creative fire that infuses the bodies of human man beings”<sup>47</sup>, which is the inner source of the movement of the whole cosmos, permeates through everything and everyone: “Always think of the universe,” wrote Marcus Aurelius, “as one living organism, with a single substance and a single soul.”<sup>48</sup> The world is thus seen as one great spiritual and rational being where everything is interconnected and because the universal interconnectedness, Stoicism recognizes “the creative spark in each individual, giving the stoic a duty to promote a political and civil order that mirrors the order of the created cosmos.”<sup>49</sup> The Stoics identify

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<sup>45</sup> *The Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 101

<sup>46</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 69

<sup>47</sup> ‘breath’ in Greek, quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 281

<sup>48</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, p. 73

<sup>49</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 352

themselves with the “impartial, inevitable, moral order of the universe”<sup>50</sup> ; hence their insistence on the basic virtues of reason, self-reliance, free will, and proverbial peace of mind which enable a stoic sage to bear and endure all the calamities of life. Thus, one can remain free even in prison for it is possible to imprison merely one’s body but not one’s mind, will, or reason. The highly respected teacher of Stoicism, Epictetus followed the basic Cynical requirement and lived a life of extreme simplicity and voluntary poverty. His *Discourses* “include an emphasis on submissiveness, humility, and charity, but also upon the ability and duty of a person to mould his or her character in the effort to achieve self-government and independence of external circumstance.”<sup>51</sup>

Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, maintained that if people were left to live in concordance with their natural dispositions, there would be no need for laws and regulations. Kropotkin appropriately called Zeno the “best exponent of anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece.”<sup>52</sup> In Zeno’s *Republic*, which could be seen as a kind of antithesis to Plato’s more authoritarian and hierarchical order of state, the picture of a purely anarchistic society is rendered: “there are no lawcourts, police, armies, temples, schools, money or even marriage? People live as a single ‘herd’ without family and property, with no distinctions of race or rank, and without the need for money or courts of law. Above all, there is no longer any need for compulsion. People fulfill their natures living in a stateless society of complete equality and freedom which spreads across the whole globe.”<sup>53</sup>

The Stoic philosophy has been of remarkable value for the generations to come for its teachings of equality and brotherhood of all people and nations, and essentially for its critique of injustice caused by the institution of slavery. Stoicism proves highly relevant not only for its strong anarchistic content but especially for our subsequent discussion: as it will be shown in chapters five and six, the basic Stoic principles of pantheistic monism together with its emphasis on the individual directly influenced the consciousness, spirit and writings of both, Emerson and Thoreau.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 352

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117

<sup>52</sup> Kropotkin, *Anarchism*, quoted in *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 70

<sup>53</sup> *Demanding the impossible*, pp. 70-71

## CHAPTER THREE: THE RULE OF EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE IN THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTARIAN THOUGHT

### 3. 1 Anarchism versus Libertarianism

In general, I define an anarchist as one who rejects all forms of external government and the State and believes that society and individuals would function well without them. A libertarian on the other hand is one who takes liberty to be a supreme value and would like to limit the powers of government to a minimum compatible with security. The line between anarchist and libertarian is thin, and in the past the terms have often been used interchangeably. But while all anarchists are libertarian, not all libertarians are anarchists. Even so, they are members of the same clan, share the same ancestors and bear resemblances.<sup>54</sup>

Anarchy can be perceived as branch-off from classical libertarian thought and action which can be considered to have accompanied human beings in search for freedom ever since the dawn of mankind. “The first anarchist was the first person who felt the oppression of another and rebelled against it,”<sup>55</sup> asserts Marshall and goes on to quote Kropotkin, the famous Russian anarchist and accomplice of notorious Bakunin, who observed that “throughout the history of our civilization, two traditions, two opposing tendencies have confronted each other: the Roman and the Popular; the imperial and the federalist; the authoritarian and the libertarian.”<sup>56</sup> Anarchism, being of course a part of the latter tradition, seeks to emphasize the value of freedom and unrestrained confidence in self-assertion as an indispensable part of the individual’s constitution.

Marshall also notes, that “from the beginning, anarchy has denoted both the negative sense of unruliness which leads to disorder and chaos, and the positive sense of a free society in which rule is no longer necessary.”<sup>57</sup> This is where those classifiable as libertarians strongly oppose the anarchist tendencies of unruliness and violence, seeing in human nature a much more refined and even divine strain. It can be said though, that libertarians all welcome and celebrate the ideals of free society in which external or centralized rule is no longer relevant but find that a gradual forthcoming of this state, along with a growing moral consciousness in the individual is vital for its fruition. Most commonly, libertarians whole-heartedly give in to the vision of pure freedom as expressed by the individual and find that human beings would be perfectly capable of

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. xiii

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 3

governing themselves, were they to achieve a level of maturity echoed in terms of cooperation and altruism as serving the ultimate means for liberation from oppression. Yet, the same vision is true for anarchy which “holds up the ideal of personal freedom as a form of autonomy which does not restrict the freedom of others. It proposes a free society without government in which people make their own free structures. It looks to a time when human beings are not only free from each other, but are able to help each other and all life-forms to realize their full potential.”<sup>58</sup>

It was in the nineteenth century, that we found that discussions of anarchy and social orders such as syndicalism, communism and other diverse variations of egalitarian systems, struggling to replace the crumbling monarchies, were most heated. Most alternatives proposed to liberate the poor and the oppressed, most commonly the working class, from their subjugation to the elite governing classes which, by possessing superiority of wealth and power, exercised the right to dominate the masses. Anarchism, communism and syndicalism, amongst the most recognized, sought to abolish these privileges of the wealthy and prosperous and saw absolutely no moral right in the authoritarian procedures of the ruling class. They wished and fought for a society and culture of free men and women, where every individual was to have the right to thrive, ultimately in his own way. Driven by such a vision, many individuals elaborated social structures based on egalitarian terms, conjuring methods of revolt and transition into the new unfettered systems of cooperation and emancipation instead of the emerging democratic capitalist systems based on competition and coercion by the State.

Libertarians, however, most commonly shied away from direct action to promote and invigorate the movements, except by writing. They did, however, applaud and encourage anarchism but could never come to terms with violence as its means to social change and freedom. Libertarians were commonly advocates of minimal government; in Humboldt’s words, there is a minimal legitimacy of State intervention if “freedom would destroy the very conditions without which not only freedom but even existence itself would be inconceivable.”<sup>59</sup> Whereas for anarchists state and government have to be done away with completely: “While society is invariably a blessing, they accept that the State is an artificial superstructure separate from society. It is an instrument of oppression, and one of the principal causes of social evil.”<sup>60</sup> It was and is a matter of pitched debate whether or not complete chaos would incur due to the effect of

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<sup>58</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 42

<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, quoted in *The Essential Chomsky*, “Language and Freedom”, p. 87

<sup>60</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 18



the dissolution of government and state. Bertrand Russell, for instance, found that in the human nature there is a profound potential for a harmonious and autonomous life lead without the curb of governments but from what he perceived, people were simply not ready yet. “My own opinion, is that pure anarchism, though it should be the ultimate ideal, to which society should continually approximate, is for the present impossible, and would not survive more than a year or two at most if it were adopted.”<sup>61</sup>

From cases of anarchist outrages which saw the only possible way for change through terrorism it would be easy to draw rigid lines between anarchists and libertarians but one thing is that even amongst anarchists we find pacifist approaches as the Dutch anarchist Bart de Ligt argued, “the greater the violence, the less revolution.”<sup>62</sup> It was perhaps by the delusion of some of the angry individuals who, waving the black flag of anarchism, hoped to escape coercion by essentially destructive means through which anarchy gained its notorious and feared reputation as instable, chaotic and destructive; yet, the imminent paradox is that “most anarchists believe that the best way to bring about improvement is to let nature pursue its own beneficent course,”<sup>63</sup> that is, they wished to disperse the restrictions and authoritarian tendencies to let in a natural current of independence and self-reliance which is present in human nature.

A plausible justification for the anger, frustration and destruction that was emerging from the paralyzed working class may be considered to be due to the lack of freedom and the amount of coercion suffocating the individual and finally causing the explosions of viscous malevolence in behavior. Yet, although violent acts do deserve to be considered disagreeable and ineffective, they give a sober and telling account of the stifling situation prevailing in society throughout history. A measure of rebellion by the people is thus necessary to bring the issues and problems in the society to the fore, to make the suffering at least noticeable, furthermore, when the poor masses are treated with utter disrespect, one must agree with Oscar Wilde that the poor are “ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so... Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and rebellion.”<sup>64</sup> Chomsky argues on similar lines, yet he strongly adheres to the moral imperative that “no rational person

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<sup>61</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom*, p. 17

<sup>62</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, pp. 6-7

<sup>63</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 15

<sup>64</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man*, p. 4

will approve of violence and terror. In particular, the terror of the postrevolutionary state, fallen into the hands of a grim autocracy, has more than once reached indescribable levels of savagery. Yet no person of understanding or humanity will too quickly condemn the violence that often occurs when long-subdued masses rise against their oppressors, or take their first step towards liberty and social reconstruction.”<sup>65</sup>

It is natural to understand the consequences that subduing our fellow men will have when one is steadfast in the notion that liberty is an intrinsic and un-extricable composite of human nature and development. One must ultimately be left to go his own way, almost deliberately to develop one’s own breadth and depth of scope, for in Immanuel Kant’s words “to accept the principle that freedom is worthless for those under one’s control and that one has the right to refuse it to them forever, is an infringement on the rights of God himself, who has created man to be free.”<sup>66</sup>

Anarchism holds an invariable prospect that we are born equal and free. It is also where its fundamental similarity with socialism lies. Anarchists like socialists see no need for private property and consider it a primary hindrance to the social equilibrium between men and women. The point on which they disagree is centralized power.

All anarchists thus believe that without the artificial restrictions of the State and government, without the coercion of imposed authority, a harmony of interests amongst human beings will emerge... Anarchists, whatever their persuasion, believe in spontaneous order. Given common needs, they are confident that human beings can organize themselves and create a social order which will prove far more effective and beneficial than any imposed by authority.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. 2 The Dominion of Man over Man

Thus, in essence, libertarians and anarchists share a common dictum that human beings possess the intrinsic capacity to live harmoniously and in conscious cooperation mirroring the spontaneous orders of nature whose immanent unity provides the grounds for growth, evolution

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<sup>65</sup> *The Essential Chomsky*, “Language and Freedom”, p. 80

<sup>66</sup> Immanuel Kant, quoted in *The Essential Chomsky*, p. 80

<sup>67</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 16

and liberation. “Human beings, [Kropotkin] argued, had evolved natural instincts of sympathy and cooperation which were repressed or distorted in authoritarian and capitalist States. In the spontaneous order of a free society, they would re-emerge and be strengthened.”<sup>68</sup> The only condition is that there be given slack on the hold which bind men to each other, in other words, the eradication of the dominion of man over man. Yet, it is important to recognize that even anarchists find that:

freedom is only a relative, not an absolute concept, since it tends constantly to become broader and to affect wider circles in more manifold ways. For the anarchist, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him, and turn them to social account. The less this natural development of man is influenced by ecclesiastical or political guardianship, the more efficient and harmonious will human personality become, the more will it become the measure of the intellectual culture of the society in which it has grown.<sup>69</sup>

By perceiving freedom as something which is not to be forcibly attained but rather to be nurtured and successively developed, anarchists accentuate the need for a social order which would instigate and nourish such development of human nature. By perceiving human nature to be fundamentally drawn to freedom and autonomy they would like to see a social order that would incessantly arouse in the individual the curiosity and spontaneity to reach such independence and the cooperative spirit to bring it about.

One of the strengths of anarchy is that it deals with the hard, cold facts of the realities that result from highly centralized, wealth and power accumulating societies. All anarchists and libertarians share a highly critical tone to any notion of subservience and slavery, yet, the way they deal with the repression and their ultimate visions greatly differ. The common distaste of anarchists is shared in their view of the State. By its centralized position and its monopoly of power it becomes the epitome and the cause of misery emerging from basic social inequality and militantly enforced order. In the following paragraph Marshall gives a telling account of the rise of the power of the State:

The State emerged with economic inequality. It was only when a society was able to produce a surplus which could be appropriated by a few that private property and class relations developed. When the rich called on the support of the shaman or warrior, the State as an association claiming supreme authority in a given area began to emerge. Laws were made to protect private property and enforced by a special group of armed men. The

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<sup>68</sup> *Demanding The Impossible*, p. 17

<sup>69</sup> Rudolf Rocker, quoted in *The Essential Chomsky*, pp. 92-93

State was thus founded on social conflict, not, as Locke imagined, by rational men of goodwill who made a social contract in order to set up a government to make life more certain and convenient.<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, one may argue that life for most of us does become more secure and convenient when a totalitarian rule or authority is erected to put us all in line. Otherwise the class war would have ended decades ago with the people assuming power to govern their own affairs without the need for a centralized State. Why then, we may ask, are we still witnesses to unjustifiable submission when to the anarchist it was and remains evident that the State “is an instrument of oppression, and one of the principal causes of social evil...They [the anarchists] do not believe that it forms a moral being or a body politic which is somehow greater than the sum of its parts. They look through its mystifying ceremony and ritual which veil its naked power. They question its appeals to patriotism and democracy to justify the rule of the ruling minority.”<sup>71</sup>

We may argue upon libertarian lines to help clarify why people have been so willing to succumb to the State, no matter how oppressive. We may observe that the fundamental goal of libertarians is to find a unity amongst all diversity and to frequently exercise independence of character, speech and action - that it was the notion of self-reliance and equity as well as the moral right to be yourself that we find encouraging and inspiring. From Humboldt to Chomsky, Emerson to Nietzsche, from Mill to Wilde and Tolstoy to Gandhi we find an array of inspiration whilst dealing with the thorny subject of the ruthless and despotic oppression of the masses by the ruling classes. However, it is not merely the question of external oppression and for suggestions of why the vast majority so easily succumbs to coercive rule we may probe the heritage of the libertarians who always dealt firstly with the individual, the self, the character before dealing with matters pertaining to the civil and political spheres.

Yet, in the locus of anarchist thought which is in their dedication to the questions of freedom, we may find valuable starting points for targeting the reason why man has always been vulnerable to enslavement by oppressors. It is perhaps when the oppressor persuades its victims to feel as though they are secure and better off in its grasp that people succumb to dwindling in their power.

Anarchists are also aware, as Erich Fromm pointed out, that many people fear freedom because of the responsibility it entails and in times of economic insecurity and social

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<sup>70</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, pp. 17-18

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

unrest look to strong leaders to tell them what to think and do. Isolated and rootless individuals in modern society readily resort to devotion and submission to authoritarian organizations or the State. Like Adam after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden for rebelling against the authority of God, newly won freedom can appear to modern man as a curse; 'he is free *from* the sweet bondage of paradise, but he is not free *to* govern himself, to realize his individuality.'<sup>72</sup>

This was and is what libertarians and anarchists are primarily concerned with - to realize this individuality. What were its precincts, how far could it expand?

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<sup>72</sup> *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 41

## CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY

While anarchists mostly treated the auspicious subject of individuality in the arena of politics, libertarians, such as R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau and others sought to elicit the independence of the individual in the spheres of spirituality or art. What they were seeking was an infinite expansion of character beyond the confines of institutionalized and indoctrinated freedom. They realized that any freedom or liberty as an ideology handed down to the masses was limited and thus, short sighted at least as far as potential and uniqueness was concerned. But they won the imagination of thousands by giving them an image and inspiration of what was humanly possible. Emerson may not have gone into the streets, shouting anarchist slogans and waving the black flag but his will to pull himself out of the cage of his own limitation was so strong that he may be considered of the highest anarchist sensibility. He knew that the true ruler, the true authoritative discernor of justice, goodness and truth was inside of each man and woman. Emerson offers a resolute confession of the immutability of character:

Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities. I shall endeavor to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife, - but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me, and the heart appoints... It is alike your interest and mine and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth. Does this sound harsh to-day? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine; and if we follow truth, it will bring us out safe at last.<sup>73</sup>

Emerson was sure that if one could succeed in bringing out the best in oneself, the faculty to discern truth amongst others, such an individual would no longer be liable or vulnerable to persuasive indoctrinations of the State or Church, whatever the ruling power figure imposed. Nonetheless, he did not go against the State or Clergy per se, he was merely highly critical of unnecessary interventions on their part to burst the natural willingness in the individual to reach for freedom and truth by oneself. In his essay "Politics" he assigns all importance to the strength of character as a means to transcend the limitations authoritarian institutions impose:

The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy, -- he loves men too well; no bribe, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable

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<sup>73</sup> R. W. Emerson, "Self-Reliance", p. 37

circumstance. He needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is a prophet; no statute book, for he has the lawgiver; no money, for he is value; no road, for he is at home where he is; no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him, and looks from his eyes. He has no personal friends, for he who has the spell to draw the prayer and piety of all men unto him, needs not husband and educate a few, to share with him a select and poetic life. His relation to men is angelic; his memory is myrrh to them; his presence, frankincense and flowers.<sup>74</sup>

Thus we can be made sure that leaving no room for doubt in the progress of our being, the highest morals and essences of life will be delivered without compensation, justly, and equally to all. Emerson's outstanding contribution to libertarian and anarchist thought lies in its unflinching faith in the progress of humanity and its ultimate resurgence in the wellsprings of strong, independent and compassionate individuals.

#### 4.1 Emerson – The Perpetual Rebel and Antagonist

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs. Whoso would be a man must be nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind.<sup>75</sup>

These Emerson's words place the individual rights high above the laws of society and put the former into a formal opposition to the latter. The words sum up the central idea of American pragmatism according to which the self-reliant person determines his or her authenticity that is independent of social constructs. The American paradigm rejects authority, stressing the self-generating identity and transcends all external determination. The subsequent essays, "Self-Reliance", "Spiritual Laws", and "Politics" examined in this chapter are all characterized by strong social and political criticism and denote the unmistakable anarchistic and libertarian overtones present therein.

In "Self-Reliance" Emerson emphasizes the need and responsibility of every individual for a radical change in his relationship towards social institutions. In other words, we have a

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<sup>74</sup> R. W. Emerson, "Politics", p. 283

<sup>75</sup> R. W. Emerson, "Self-Reliance", p. 25-26

moral and political responsibility to fulfill the internal process of self-awareness, that is, to rely on the individual self rather than on the government and public institutions. The belief in oneself is crucial here: “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events.”<sup>76</sup>

Emerson points out that society is inherently conservative and stationary and although it transforms with time, the change is superficial, not evolutionary or beneficial: “Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other... For everything that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts, and loses old instincts.”<sup>77</sup> In institutionalized society there is no unity, no moral consciousness, no authentic betterment, for its composition is purely accidental; genuine power lies with the individuals. In a true democratic spirit Emerson argues for their ultimate equality on the basis of the identical source of their creative energy.

At the same time, he stipulates that the two greatest enemies of individual growth are consistency and conformity. Rigidly adhering to any particular truth is absurd for ideas continuously change, develop and expand; life is in flux, perpetual movement and identities constantly shift: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds”<sup>78</sup> warns Emerson emphasizing the importance of the living process over the product that is fixed, and eventually, subject to degeneration and transformation. In the ever-changing fluid reality the process of internal perception, constant reevaluation and recognition are crucial. Similarly, the only possible form of conformity is a faithful adherence to the inconsistent and rebellious evolution of the self. “For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure.”<sup>79</sup> Thus the individual must stand inevitably in a formal opposition to society and this ultimately leads to the idea of self-government.

In “Spiritual Laws” Emerson sharply criticizes conventional education together with the orthodox religion, directly challenging the established authority of both systems. According to Emerson, one of the biggest problems is that instead of ourselves, we tend to rely too much on society with its stale order and outdated institutions. He compares it to a “Chinese Wall” and a “standing army” that in its fixity becomes a superfluous stumbling block and basically a great nuisance. Our governments, laws, religions and schools are thus prisons which make us likewise stale and obsolete: “We pass in the world for sects and

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<sup>76</sup> “Self-Reliance”, p. 24

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 28



schools, for erudition and piety: and we are all the time jejune babes.”<sup>80</sup> Emerson describes young people as “diseased with the theological problems”<sup>81</sup> and demands: “Do not shut up the young people against their will in a pew, and force the children to ask them questions for an hour against their will”<sup>82</sup> and maintains that the formal schooling destroys our natural capacities and creative potential: “education often wastes its effort in attempts to thwart and baulk this natural magnetism which with sure discrimination selects its own.”<sup>83</sup>

He urges everyone to “unlearn the wisdom of the world”<sup>84</sup>, to listen to one’s inner voice of guiding intuition, to discover one’s natural talent and vocation, for “every man has this call of the power to do somewhat unique, and no man has any other call”<sup>85</sup>, and finally, to accept one’s humanity as the most valid moral law itself and express it in a creative way: “Accept your genius, and say what you think.”<sup>86</sup> In a true anarchistic spirit he warns against becoming a part of the machinery, that is, fitting or adapting oneself to the society: “The common experience is, that the man fits himself as well as he can to the customary details of that work or trade he falls into, and tends it as a dog turns a spit. Then is he a part of the machine he moves; the man is lost.”<sup>87</sup> The only way to survive with the dignity of a complete human being is by adapting the world to one’s own needs: “A man’s genius, the quality that differences him from every other, the susceptibility to one class of influences, the selection of what is fit for him, the rejection of what is unfit, determines the character of the universe. As a man thinketh so is he; and as a man chooseth, so is he and so is nature.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, a man is a law to himself.

In “Politics” Emerson advocates the idea of self-government and moral revolution; he refutes the laws of society and acknowledges only the individual internal laws “for, any laws but those which men make for themselves, are laughable”<sup>89</sup>; he protests against basic inhumanity of forceful and impersonal methods of the government in collecting taxes, expressing the irony of the fact that men all over the world have always had a strange reluctance to pay them:

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<sup>80</sup> “Spiritual Laws”, p. 68

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 65

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 67

<sup>83</sup> “Spiritual Laws”, p. 66

<sup>84</sup> “Spiritual Laws”, p. 79

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>89</sup> “Politics”, p. 283

This is the history of governments – one man does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me, ordains that a part of my labour shall go to this or that whimsical end, not as I, but as he happens to fancy. Behold the consequence. Of all debts, men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire is this on government! Everywhere they think they get their money's worth, except for these.<sup>90</sup>

Emerson points out that individual integrity and moral consciousness is the key thing in any existing state: "Governments have their origin in the moral identity of men."<sup>91</sup> Hence the state should encourage individual cultivation and spiritual growth: "State must follow, and not lead the character and progress of the citizen."<sup>92</sup> The following paragraph denotes a strong anarchistic sentiment; here, rather than forceful methods, Emerson advocates the idea of moral revolution in the individual:

The tendencies of the time favour the idea of self-government, and leave the individual, for all code, to the rewards and penalties of his own constitution, which work with more energy than we believe, whilst we depend on artificial restraints. The movement in this direction has been very marked in modern history. Much has been blind and discreditable, but the nature of the revolution is not affected by the vices of the revolters; for this is purely moral force. It was never adopted by any party in history, neither can be. It separates the individual from all party, and unites him, at the same time, to the race. It promises a recognition of higher rights than those of personal freedom, or the security of property. A man has a right to be employed, to be trusted, to be loved, to be revered. The power of love, as the basis of a state, has never been tried.<sup>93</sup>

Incurred Generally, Emerson sees present governments as essentially fraudulent: "Every actual State is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too well."<sup>94</sup> He does not consider the government absolutely necessary, nor does he acknowledge its laws or ultimate authority; he believes that because governments are comprised of individuals, these are infinitely superior to the state which should mainly serve and provide a basic education:

Hence, the less government we have, the better, - the fewer laws, and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal Government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual; the appearance of the principal to supersede the proxy; the appearance of the wise man, of whom the existing government, is, it must be owned, but a shabby imitation. That which all things tend to educe, which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver, is character; that is the end of nature, to reach unto this coronation of her king. To educate the wise man, the State

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<sup>90</sup> "Politics", p. 283

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 282

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 276

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 285

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 280

exists; and with the appearance of the wise man, the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the state.<sup>95</sup>

## 4.2 Thoreau: ‘Action from Principle’

In 1846, during the first year of his sojourn at the Walden Pond Henry Thoreau was arrested for refusing to pay the poll tax; he insisted upon being imprisoned in a protest against a government that supported the unjust Mexican war, promoting the expansion of Southern slavery. He recorded this episode in his famous essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” which was published anonymously in 1849. Thoreau was an active rebel against social evils and the tyranny of established authority; his protest against the American government and his act of civil disobedience reflect the struggle of the individual versus society, the formal opposition of the individual citizen against government and the superiority of the inner moral laws over the legal laws of state. In his essay he expands Emerson’s ideas but goes even further and actually acts upon them: he takes the stand, officially rebels against the state, literally breaks the law, and spends one memorable night in prison.

Thoreau believes “that government is best which governs not at all.”<sup>96</sup> He warns against too much control, corruption and inertia of the American government and for his part refuses to be associated with it and officially renounces it. He points out that because of its inherently dehumanized nature, the government no longer serves the people but only its own needs; he sees the state as a piece of machinery which people serve automatically, with only their bodies or heads but without any moral participation whatsoever:

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones... Others – as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office holders – serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without *intending* it, as God.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Politics”, pp. 283-284

<sup>96</sup> H. D. Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”, p. 85

<sup>97</sup> “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”, p. 87

Thoreau calls for the “action from principle”<sup>98</sup>, for the need and the right to rebel and revolutionize; he is convinced that the inherently corruptible state machine should be resisted by every freedom loving individual and feels the only way how to stop the machine is by throwing oneself under its wheels: “I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.”<sup>99</sup> He passionately believes that under a corrupt and unjust government all decent and honest citizens should be in prison for it is “the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor.”<sup>100</sup> According to him, people have a moral and political obligation to resist such governments by withdrawing financial and individual support from it; for example, by refusing to vote and pay taxes.

Finally, Thoreau concludes that in a truly democratic government it is essential to recognize individual power and authority; since governments are comprised of individuals, only the internal and individual laws are the ones which ultimately make any sense: “There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.”<sup>101</sup>

Thoreau’s essay has been very influential ever since: it inspired Mahatma Gandhi’s campaign of passive resistance in the fight for the Indian Independence and guided Martin Luther King in the Civil-right movement throughout the American South. In his essay Lawrence A. Rosenwald “The Theory, Practice, and Influence of Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience” discusses the enormous/great impact of the essay upon its many readers all over the world; among the most celebrated examples were Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Included in the essay is an excerpt from Martin Luther King’s book *A Testament of Hope*; shortly before the Montgomery bus boycott; King, inspired by Thoreau’s act of civil disobedience, writes thus: “I remembered how, as a college student, I had been moved when I first read this book. I became convinced that what we were preparing to do in Montgomery was related to what Thoreau had expressed.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Civil Disobedience”, p. 91

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 92

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 94

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 104

<sup>102</sup> Lawrence A. Rosenwald “The Theory, Practice, and Influence of Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience”, p. 161, quoted in *A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. William E. Cain. Further discussion on this topic is to be found in chapter 6

In *Walden, or Life in the Woods* Thoreau is very much concerned about people leading their lives in alienation and passivity, filled with mechanical actions: “the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity... he has no time to be any thing but a machine.”<sup>103</sup> Here, once again we can hear the echo of Emerson’s “Spiritual Laws”; when the man becomes the part of machine, he is truly, inevitably, irrevocably lost. In the following remarkable paragraph Thoreau warns earnestly against resignation and conformity to the rigidly stale ways of society: “The mass of men leads lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the braver of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.”<sup>104</sup>

At the same time, Thoreau is aware of inevitable human limitations and understands that people cannot easily change their entire lives; yet he trusts and hopes in the real possibility of transforming consciousness. He endeavors to show that change is not only possible but inevitable: “all change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant”<sup>105</sup>, and that there is no need to fear our true selves for we are masters of our destinies. He believes that most obstacles are superficial and self-created – by our own lack of faith, sense of inadequacy, or ignorance of our true nature. “If a man has faith he will cooperate with equal faith every where; if he has not a faith, he will continue to live like the rest of the world, whatever company he is joined to. To cooperate, in the highest as well as the lowest sense, means *to get our living together*.”<sup>106</sup>

### 4.3 Self-Reliance

Thus, according to Emerson and Thoreau, not the laws of society but those of the individual are essential; however, in order to become a strong and self-reliant being, it is ultimately the faith in oneself that is crucial. “To believe your own thought, to believe that what

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<sup>103</sup> *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, p. 109

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159

is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men – that is genius.”<sup>107</sup> Thus Emerson in “Self-Reliance” urges us to have faith in the authenticity of our nature, the confidence in the process of its re-creation, the courage to be at all times who we truly are meant to be... hence, to be able to be true to one’s genius, that is, one’s individual potential, according to Emerson, represents the genuine power.

Yet, inevitably, the crucial questions arise: where do we find that trust and confidence? How do we access that creative power and how do we find the courage to be ourselves? And finally, what does Emerson really mean by the ‘genius’? Let us see whether F. O. Matthiessen can shed some light upon the matter; in his book *American Renaissance*, in the chapter “Expression” he writes about Emerson’s possible meaning: “His shortest definition of it was ‘that redundancy or excess of life which in conscious beings we call *ecstasy*’... But genius was not merely the affirmation of superabundant personal force; it was likewise reception, the openness of man to his deepest impulse, the maximum influx of the divine mind into his own.”<sup>108</sup>

Emerson believes in the universal divinity of the mind and inherent potential in each and every one of us to experience the union with the divine force. “God enters by a private door into every individual.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, it is possible to access the divine creative power which knows no boundaries. But where does he find the certainty? In the next chapter let us examine the nature of human consciousness as Emerson perceives it, let us probe into, what he calls, “the holy and mysterious recesses of life”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “Self-Reliance”, p. 23

<sup>108</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 26

<sup>109</sup> “Intellect”, p. 158

<sup>110</sup> “Man the Reformer”, p. 2 (Quoted by R. Geldard, in *The Spiritual Teachings of R. W. Emerson*)

## CHAPTER FIVE: EMERSON: 'THE INFINITUDE OF THE PRIVATE MAN'

### 5.1 The Nature of Human Consciousness

#### 5.1.1 Emerson's Language

Before we attempt any serious discussion about Emerson, it is necessary to say a few words about Emerson's language and style of writing. In the Introduction to *Essays and Poems* by Ralph Waldo Emerson Tony Tanner writes that Emerson "regarded language as potentially a trap which is liable to check us to the point of stagnation and even decay – indeed 'stationariness'."<sup>111</sup> Emerson's writing, which corresponds to his philosophy, is oblique and indirect, resembling a ship sailing into the wind in "a zigzag line of a hundred tacks"<sup>112</sup>, albeit with a strong deliberate course. He employs numerous names for God: 'Divinity', 'Supreme Mind', 'the One Universal Mind', 'Over-Soul', 'the One', 'the Genius', 'the divine Providence', 'the Almighty', or simply, 'Love': "Love is our highest word, and the synonym of God."<sup>113</sup> Emerson often uses expressions like good and evil interchangeably to illustrate the duality of the human mind and he also uses words like 'nature', 'truth', 'God', 'law', 'genius' very inconsistently, changing ever so often their meaning. Moreover, he uses the paradox in order to express the very ambiguity and relativity of our attempt to express the truth: thus, in "Spiritual Laws" Emerson affirms: "action and inaction are alike to the true", "your silence answers very loud," and speaks against language itself and the inadequacy of words: "The sentence must also contain its own apology for being spoken."<sup>114</sup> Given the essential fluidity of our world, perpetually in the process of evolving, Emerson sees language rather as a vehicle for the activity of the thinking process itself: "for all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead."<sup>115</sup> He maintains that truth, by its continually evolving and changeable nature, is after all, virtually indefinable by language. Any definition is limiting: "But if I speak, I define, I

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<sup>111</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, quoted in Introduction by Tony Tanner, p. xxvi

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., "Self-Reliance", p. 30, the quote in full: "The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks."

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., "Love", p. 83

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., "Spiritual Laws", pp. 81, 77, 76

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., "The Poet", p. 197

confine, and I am less”<sup>116</sup>; truth itself is never fixed or stable but endlessly constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed from the multitude of individual perspectives: “Truth has not single victories; all things are its organs, not only dust and stones, but errors and lies.”<sup>117</sup> Emerson is a writer of contradictions: “the mind goes antagonizing on, and never prospers, but by fits.”<sup>118</sup> He brings about many different concepts – introduces, affirms and denies them on each subsequent page. He does not provide any answers nor does he offer any definitions; Richard Poirier in the Introduction to *Ralph Waldo Emerson* writes:

Of Emerson it should be said that he cultivated the art of *not* arriving at intellectualized conclusions. His kind of writing does not compose itself and then wait for interpretations; rather it participates in disruptive interrogations of what is, after all, a not peculiar tendency in sentences and paragraphs to come to an end and to make a point... Everywhere in his writing are signs of an extraordinarily rare activity of mind on the page, an extraordinary resistance to translation into the sagacities presumably appropriate to him as the sage of Concord. Emerson is not important because he needs to be retrieved by the culture he helped shape but because he enacts a mode of thinking which that culture has never dared to practice and that may, to borrow Lionel Trilling’s phrase, be beyond culture.<sup>119</sup>

### 5.1.2 The Act of Reflection

In 1840 Emerson wrote in his journal: “In all my lectures, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man”, quotes Matthiessen in the chapter “Consciousness” of *American Renaissance* and affirms: “Such a statement is the point from which any consideration of Emerson as an artist must start.”<sup>120</sup> It is essential to realize that the nature of individual consciousness was indeed Emerson’s “subject matter”<sup>121</sup> and that Emerson was firstly and predominantly a ‘student of mind’ – his whole life was devoted to the examination of the nature of intellect: ‘he was occupied with consciousness, not with self-consciousness. He wanted to

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<sup>116</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Intellect”, p. 165

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., “Spiritual laws”, p. 77

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., “Experience”, pp. 213-214

<sup>119</sup> *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, quoted in Introduction by Richard Poirier, p. xi

<sup>120</sup> *American Renaissance*, p. 6

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



study the laws of the mind, what he called throughout life the natural history of the intellect, but he always felt a repugnance to self-centered introversion.”<sup>122</sup>

Throughout his life Emerson was a strong adherent of exercising the intellect and of self-disciplined mental training. He was himself an accomplished and diligent student. Richard Geldard in *The spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* recounts the instance when during his early studies of Greek thought he came across the philosopher Archimedes; the famous maxim “Give me a place to stand and I will move the Earth” became an important source of inspiration to Emerson: “the place to stand was the mind, his own reasoning and reflective faculty, which when poised properly was capable of ‘moving the earth.’”<sup>123</sup> Geldard also records that “Emerson even went so far as to name his next journals ‘A place to stand.’”<sup>124</sup>

Emerson repeatedly stressed in all his writings the sole individual responsibility of studying the mind, for he considered the mind as an important means for relating to the world. Hence the mind which rules the whole physical body as well as the spiritual and emotional life, becomes of crucial importance – a place to stand, a basic starting-point, a firm foundation. And in the workings of the mind Emerson found the key to understanding the universe. The “act of reflection” thus represents a crucial point in Emerson’s work as he himself states in “Spiritual Laws”, the essay of utmost importance, which is related precisely to the subject matter of the individual consciousness:

When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty. Behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do far off... For it is only the finite that has wrought and suffered; the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *American Renaissance*, pp. 8-9

<sup>123</sup> Richard Geldard, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 13

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> R. W. Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 65

### 5.1.3 “Spiritual Laws”

“The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all”<sup>126</sup>, writes Emerson in the “American Scholar” in 1837. One year later he proceeds in a similar vein in “Divinity School Address”: “The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance.”<sup>127</sup> With these words Emerson places the natural and spiritual laws of the individual high above the laws of society and emphasizes the inner intellectual and creative potential, inherent in all of us. The essential role of personal intuition and the authentication of human experience in the ever-changing reality around us would eventually constitute major themes in the subsequent *Essays*, published in 1841 and where Emerson becomes an advocate for general non-conformity in thinking and being.

In “Spiritual Laws” Emerson questions the validity of teaching institutions and the established authority of the church. He maintains that the only valid spiritual and natural law is the law of one’s own creative mind and that the most inspiring teacher is our own intuitive self. The essay, however, is not a mere attack on education and religion but a protest-song against overall intellectual stagnation, restriction and limitation; it strives after continual empowerment and enlightenment of the individual through free, constant flow of ideas towards an ultimate liberation of the human mind.

According to Emerson, there are infinite possibilities for us: it is what we need, choose, accept, or refuse; we are endowed with a great inherent intellectual power through which all our actions generate: “we know that the ancestor of every action is a thought... to think is to act.”<sup>128</sup> Our mind is a powerful force that like a magnet attracts all ideas and people in related “spiritual affinity” with it: “A man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle, gathering his like to him, wherever he goes. He takes only his own, out of the multiplicity that sweeps and circles around him.”<sup>129</sup> Emerson emphasizes that a truly inspiring relationship is possible only with “a person of related mind, a brother or a sister by nature”<sup>130</sup>, with the “native of the same

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<sup>126</sup> *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “American Scholar”, p. 244

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., “Divinity School Address”, p. 247

<sup>128</sup> R. W. Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 81

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 74

celestial attitude.”<sup>131</sup> All authentic teaching and learning is grounded on the idea of spiritual affinity and can be characterized by mutual inspiration and interchange of ideas: “There is no teaching until the pupil is brought into the same state or principle in which you are; a transfusion takes place; he is you, and you are he...”<sup>132</sup> Based on the notion of spiritual affinity, essentially, we attract people, events and things which are similar and close to us, in other words, we attract exactly what we need to attract at any given moment to become our authentic selves. Hence, “*do not choose*”<sup>133</sup>, Emerson beacons, go with the flow and be yourself. We are inevitably fated to be what we are and accept what is given, what comes to us naturally and easily.

The central point in Emersonian philosophy is the idea of constant change and perpetual flow. Consequently, in our ever-changing reality we experience a constant self-renewal; we move beyond ourselves and continually adopt new kinds of identity: “This revisal or correction is a constant force, which as a tendency, reaches through our lifetime. The object of the man, the aim of these moments, is to make daylight shine through him, to suffer the law to traverse his whole being without obstruction...”<sup>134</sup> Here the law, universally valid, is the law of continual change and perpetuity of life. The whole process of the human evolution, or the awakening process, can be illustrated by the image of an ascending spiral movement – circular yet continually moving upward and beyond each circle. “The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end.”<sup>135</sup> In the endless process of seeking and becoming “all action is of infinite elasticity”<sup>136</sup>; we swing back and forth, yet with each new swing we enter a new circle and a new reality. According to Emerson, in the moral process of “perpetual inchoation”, it is the process which is important not the product; thus, the movement towards the higher order is what is essential not the attainment of perfection. Fixity brings corruption and results in spiritual death and intellectual stagnation – once we lose the sense of our nature as fluid, evolving beings, what follows is a life of despair:

Every natural fact is an emanation, and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation. If anything could stand still, it would be crushed and dissipated by the torrent it resisted, and if it were a mind, would

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<sup>131</sup> *Essays and Poems*, p. 75

<sup>132</sup> “Spiritual Laws”, p. 75

<sup>133</sup> R. W. Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 69

<sup>134</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 80

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, “Circles”, p. 147

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

be crazed; as insane persons are those who hold fast to one thought, and do not flow with the course of nature.<sup>137</sup>

Emerson points out that the biggest problem of humanity is that we are not aware of the enormous power of the mind; given the unlimited potential of the mind it can become an ultimate source of corruption as well as of enlightenment. Like a pendulum we can be swung alternately towards virtue and sin; thus we may encounter the worst versions of ourselves: “you will never see anything worse than yourselves.”<sup>138</sup> We are imprisoned by our own dual vision of the world where the very notion of the self is an illusion and identities a mere construct: “every man sees himself in the colossal, without knowing that it is himself he sees. The good which he sees, compared to the evil which he sees, is as his own good to his own evil.”<sup>139</sup> We lack confidence and trust in ourselves and are not aware that it is ultimately we, who are responsible for both, good and evil – that we create our own heaven or hell; and yet, the experience of truth is relative; every single event can have a multitude of meanings for a multitude of individuals: “Every man sees that he is that middle point whereof every thing may be affirmed and denied with equal reason.”<sup>140</sup> Our fragmented, divided minds get stuck in the vicious circle of right and wrong, and thus, are kept from evolving and living up to our fuller potential: “We side with the hero, as we read or paint, against the coward and robber; but we have been ourselves that coward and robber, and shall be again, not in the low circumstance, but in comparison with the grandeurs possible to the soul.”<sup>141</sup> We can never rely on the sentiments with which we act today, for life is ever on the move, embodying new facts and perceptions through new experiences and new lessons. We cannot rely on the old – “to make habitually a new estimate, – that is elevation.”<sup>142</sup>

The core message of “spiritual Laws” is that once consciousness is opened, it provides the possibility of a spiritual understanding of life. “Of all the essays, this one is the most practical as a guide to opening the intellect to living in the spirit”<sup>143</sup>, writes Geldard. The following quotation from “Spiritual Laws” reflects Emerson’s trust in a Supreme Mind, the inherent divinity of the God-like nature of men and women and is characterized by uncommonly sincere compassion for all of humanity:

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<sup>137</sup> *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, “The Method of Nature”, p. 5

<sup>138</sup> *Essays and poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 73

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>143</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 92

A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would shew us that higher law than that of our will regulates events; that our painful labours are very unnecessary, and altogether fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we wrong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. Belief and love, – a believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. O my brothers, God exists. There is a soul at the centre of nature, and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe. It has so infused its strong enchantment into nature, that we prosper when we accept its advice; and when we struggle to wound its creatures, our hands are glued to our sides, or they beat our own breasts. The whole course of things goes to teach us faith. We need only obey. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word.<sup>144</sup>

## 5.2 Living in the Spirit

In *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* we find Geldard drawing to the fact that the ways in which Emerson attempted to find clear and living doctrine for himself were carried through by his own efforts of “living in the spirit.”<sup>145</sup> What this exemplifies, is the recognition Emerson held from a very young age, of a first principle that Geldard summarizes as the “moment by moment revision of spiritual knowledge in the light of the revealed laws of the mind.”<sup>146</sup> It was thus by a disciplined and successive ‘revelation’ of the workings, patterns, processes and laws of the mind that Emerson attempted to identify the inner profusion of forces that, in effect, govern our being with an array of powers that are of a much subtler origin and nature than the gross external manifest world to which we are continuously oriented and thus attached and which we discern mostly by our senses.

But what does the word subtle signify? “For Emerson subtle meant unseen, what had to be intuitively known. It also meant ‘real’ and defined a source of energy by which life was generated and sustained.”<sup>147</sup> The stress is placed on the discovery of the spirit, the life propelling force within by which we come to the authentic and intimate and thus legitimate understanding of

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<sup>144</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Spiritual Laws”, p. 69

<sup>145</sup> To “live in the spirit”, explains Geldard, “was the practical business of Transcendentalism in its ascendancy in the 1840s in New England. For Emerson and his spirit-seeking friends, life was conscious and radical interaction with subtle forces and principles of action and meaning. It also meant a conscious seeking of a reality which lay behind and beyond the surfaces of the manifest world.” *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 21

<sup>146</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 22

<sup>147</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 21

the animating force producing the light of conscious awareness. Geldard in *The Essential Transcendentalists*, differentiates:

That which is *religious* centers on form and doctrine. A religion requires a recognized body of communicants who, by definition, establish and practice a form of worship different from other gatherings of communicants. The word *spiritual* ... refers to something more subtle, animating, individual and universal. In spiritual thinking and practice, the relation between the individual and God, or the Divine Spirit or Absolute, is highly personal and not defined by ritualized devotions.<sup>148</sup>

We may stress the importance of discovering the paths and principles by which such a life in the spirit, in its conscious awareness would be made a reality, furthermore as an inherent disposition which any being with consciousness can manifest and hence an immense possibility and quality of a life lived to its full and characteristic potential. What follows is Emerson's clear recognition that God or Divine Spirit is deeply embedded in our natures:

Of this pure nature every man is at some time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colors. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that it pervades and contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man. A wise old proverb says, "God comes to see us without bell"; that is, as there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God.<sup>149</sup>

In other words, a spiritual knowledge or an intuition surpasses the limitations of language and intellect, creating a vanguard for broader, deeper perceptions. What Emerson had discovered from his deeply personal examination of the workings of his mind, was by no means new, not to say it wasn't his and in that sense original and authentic, but that he had not been the first one to have opened himself to a deeper understanding and comprehension of his own being. His findings directly tie in to a long line of ancient thought and direct action to awaken to an "authentic life in which our soul, or being, is aroused to maintain a position of authority over the riots within", suggests Geldard and continues to conclude that "we need to see exactly what causes this chaos and what steps we might take to restore the order which Plato said was our natural birthright."<sup>150</sup>

Emerson chose to chart those territories which had been left mostly uncharted, territories that the church espoused as dangerous, and in which wondering and seeking were condemned as

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Geldard, *The Essential Transcendentalists*, p. 60

<sup>149</sup> *Essays and Poems*, The Over-Soul, p. 132

<sup>150</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 38

heresy. To aid him on the journey, we find Emerson habitually referring to ‘intuition’ amongst other faculties, as an exemplary force of discovery by which is instigated the “insight into the perfection of the laws of the soul.”<sup>151</sup> Yet aids came likewise from outside, from the aforementioned conglomerate body of “radically new and yet ancient esoteric knowledge which has threaded its way from the recesses of pre-history into the sacred texts of Egypt, to the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads, through Greek Orphic texts to Pythagoras and Plato and the Neoplatonists and thence to our own age through a thin line of similar reformers.”<sup>152</sup> Hence, we find in Emerson a confluence of his own discoveries and the discoveries of others, in other words, a correlation of spontaneous, instinctive or intuitive and direct realizations, layered by philosophical inquiries into European thought and doctrine as well as Eastern religious texts, who in turn probed him to delve even deeper into the secrets of life.

What separates Emerson’s spiritual views from the typical views of the clergy is that man must be harnessed and his curiosity nullified or obliterated to produce the obedience so sought after by the authorities, whether secular, traditional, moral or religious. There is a distinct strain in Emerson’s writing and life of a certain disobedience and rebellion against the stale ornaments of doctrine and religious and moral law. Emerson was in the continuous search for fresh and new doctrine, undimmed and unstained by the opinions and dogma of others. That was essentially also his message, namely, that men and women are capable of finding truth and morals for themselves and in that way only truly able to instill it into their lives. He found that “we lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us organs of its activity and receivers of its truth. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves but allow a passage to its beams.”<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, Emerson suggests, as Geldard defines; “a radical relationship between humanity and God.”

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<sup>151</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, “Select Glossary”, p. 180

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>153</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Self Reliance”, p. 33

### 5.3 Growing Toward the Over-Soul

In that deep force, the last fact, behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.<sup>154</sup>

As mentioned previously, Emerson had a great affinity with the oriental teachings of the East. The central notion of Buddhism, which emerged and derived most of its terminology from Brahmic and Hindu doctrine, is enlightenment. It can be described as the flowering and fruition of the whole being, a moment of powerful transformation, made possible when, in Geldard's words,

the attending consciousness is elevated to a very high level of perception where it beholds the nature of things, the unity within the multiplicity of the manifest universe. In the Teaching practiced by the Buddha such an awareness yields a vision of Unity, the Oneness that is spoken of in the great Eastern texts, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, the latter of which was Emerson's frequent companion.<sup>155</sup>

The notion of oneness is the core teaching of Hinduism – everything is connected in the universe and God (the Self), the great emanating principle, is present in all things.

The self is the sun shining in the sky,  
The wind blowing in space; he is the fire  
At the altar and in the home the guest;  
He dwells in human beings, in gods, in truth,  
And in the vast firmament; he is the fish  
Born in water, the plant growing in the earth,  
The river flowing down from the mountain.  
For this Self is supreme!<sup>156</sup>

As it was shown in the subchapter “Anarchy in Antiquity” of this work, the concept of oneness with subsequent interconnectedness of the universe is present in all ancient philosophies mentioned earlier – in Taoism, Buddhism, and even in Stoicism. In Hinduism the unity with the Self (our true Self) represents the ultimate reality while the underlying illusion is that we appear to be separate. We are particles of God, thus, being a part of the Divinity, we become divine. Hence one's true nature is God-like - being firmly embedded in God - and one, in fact, is God. “The Eastern formulation of *I am God*, which is most directly stated in the Vedanta tradition, became Emerson's stand from which to form his own divine soul. It is what he meant by the phrase “the infinitude of the private man” and is the basis of his question of defining the

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<sup>154</sup> “Self-Reliance”, p. 33

<sup>155</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 30

<sup>156</sup> *The Upanishads*, p. 93 (Katha II.2.2)



Individual”<sup>157</sup>, affirms Geldard and throughout *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* records the essential Eastern influence; he suggests that as a young man, “seeking answers to the nature of God and the human relation to God, Emerson found in the Eastern texts a confirmation of his intuitions, and it is in the Gita that the concept emerges.”<sup>158</sup> In the sanctity of his journal, Emerson found in the Bhagavad Gita “the voice of an old intelligence which in another age & climate had pondered & thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.”<sup>159</sup> According to Geldard’s research, the following passage of the Lord Sri Krisna’s address from Bhagavad Gita was studied by Emerson during his senior years at Harvard:

I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. There is not anything greater than I, and all things hang on me, even as precious gems on a string. I am moisture in the water, light in the sun and moon, invocation in the *Vedas*, sound in the firmament, human nature in mankind, sweet-smelling savour in the earth, glory in the source of light: In all things I am life.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, in his intellectual biography of Emerson *The Mind on Fire* Robert Richardson notes that Emerson considered Bhagavad Gita “a transnational book” and makes repeated references to Emerson’s appreciation of the Eastern teachings. Of course, prior to writing his major book *Nature* Emerson’s inspirations were numerous – from Plato to the Stoics, from Zoroastrianism to Confucianism, from Goethe to Kant – but Richardson makes clear that Gita was the one definite source Emerson drew from.<sup>161</sup>

That which is inscribed and installed in the wonderful teaching of the East is that effort which Emerson continually drew upon, to relieve the suffering of the fragmented mind and to find sanctity in the seemingly tepid reign of nature, coming out, as it were, whole, into a universal oneness, and in an unmistakably clear way. One receives a glimpse at first of that which is “universally true, as opposed to what is privately believed “and this, Geldard stresses “arises from the research we do within the self.”<sup>162</sup> Yet it is no mistake to suppose that the affinity that Emerson felt toward the great teachings of the East was but an affirmation on their account, of the gravity and value of his own findings; in his own words, he captures some of the beautiful poetry of the above-mentioned Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita:

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<sup>157</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 60

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>160</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, quoted in *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 56

<sup>161</sup> Here Richardson enumerates all the essential influences and readings of Emerson during the fall of 1834.

*The Mind on Fire*, p. 184

<sup>162</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 29

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.<sup>163</sup>

#### 5.4 Direct Experiential ‘Knowledge’ of Oneness

Describing the philosophical insights of *Nature*, Geldard elaborates upon the crucial point of experiential knowing as a form of “personal *gnosis* or knowing-in-the-spirit-of-things,” which in definition “arises from and then makes active what resides only in sign and symbol in the great philosophical and religious texts of the fathers. A *gnosis* describes a personal experience and knowledge of divine presence. It can be described but not explained, and it cannot be passed on to others except by a re-creation in the moment of the experience of knowing.”<sup>164</sup> In short, it is what we experience that will allow us to shed light on the mysteries of life, of its laws and patterns. What we are looking for is a direct, full and complete realization that we may see ourselves as a part of life, the world and the essence of its meaning working within. Geldard continues:

A universe without its revealed forms, or laws, is a universe without meaning, since meaning cannot exist merely in the external, thus limited condition. If we ask what our role is in the universe, or what the source is of this manifestation we call the universe, then our condition, thought, perception in the moment, all these enframe the solution expressed in symbolic terms. We are our own insight at any given moment. Inquiries become our identity, and are the laws of the universe manifest in our condition, which, in turn, presage the solution to our questioning.<sup>165</sup>

We can find in Geldard’s writings a great reverence for an initial experience Emerson went through before his career as a writer even set off. Geldard asserts that the mystical experience

is not to be treated solely as a metaphor of a momentary perception of unity in the presence of the cosmos. He was declaring a unity of the experiencing self in

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<sup>163</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “The Over-Soul”, p. 131

<sup>164</sup> *Spiritual Teachings*, p. 64

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65

nature as a matter of law and design. Man, he was saying, was not a separate, alienated creature on this planet, doomed to loneliness in a nature he didn't create and therefore had to subdue. His true nature was unity... Nowhere else in his work is there a similar observation, at least not in its expression of completeness. It is the religious experience transformed to literature, elevated to poetry and given sanction.<sup>166</sup>

Emerson described the actual experience in his first major literary work, *Nature* in 1836: "Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."<sup>167</sup> This experience, according to Geldard, was to form the platform, the base for all further inquisition made by Emerson into matters of Spirit. Through the experience, he had found a direct attunement with the 'Over-Soul' for those brief yet intense enough moments to hold him to express and explore this truth, again and again. The 'undercutting' of the subject/object dualism in Emerson's 'transparent eye-ball' experience as when "all mean egotism vanishes, I am nothing; I see all", the ego, so to speak, is unarmed, and all its dichotomizing and dividing tendencies give way to a truly breath-taking vision and realization of underlying unity.

Thus, whilst true knowledge can be found in the direct experience of it, likewise, Spirit can be found by restoring sight of It within, consciously, and not for the expediency of others. Our thoughts are like match-sticks waiting to be lighted, only waiting for an appropriate cause. Of course, only the highest cause will produce the space of opportunity for a truly blazing fire. Emerson, throughout his life, diligently maintained that blazing curiosity of consciousness, probing the unknown, challenging limitation, dogma, settled doctrine and fear to see the world chaotic at bottom, and thus fundamentally creative

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<sup>166</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 69

<sup>167</sup> *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. R. Poirier, p. 6

## 5.5 Spiritual Anarchy

### 5.5.1 The Dissolution of Internal Governments

The changes which break up at short intervals the prosperity of men are advertisements of a nature whose law is growth. Every soul is by this intrinsic necessity quitting its whole system of things, its friends, and home, and laws, and faith, as the shell-fish crawls out of its beautiful but stony case, because it no longer admits of its growth, and slowly forms a new house. In proportion to the vigor of the individual, these revolutions are frequent, until in some happier mind they are incessant, and all worldly relations hang very loosely about him, becoming, as it were, a transparent fluid membrane through which the living form is seen, and not, as in most men, an indurated heterogeneous fabric of many dates, and of no settled character in which the man is imprisoned. Then there can be enlargement, and the man of to-day scarcely recognizes the man of yesterday. And such should be the outward biography of man in time, a putting off of dead circumstances day by day, as he renews his raiment day by day.<sup>168</sup>

Once we accept the dictum of impermanence, that everything is in flux, and that all things grow and evolve continually – once we realize and accept this – consciousness can begin to open. It is as though the mind needs to open for we need to create the space of freedom to realize and experience new inner depth. As a “transparent fluid membrane”, once we let go of old structures, it is as though we create a vacuum to invite new structures, higher orders, and wider perceptions in.

Let us briefly retrace our steps to the quintessential difference between anarchism and libertarianism – while anarchists most commonly tend to point to the other as the source of their misery and confinement, libertarians, on the other hand, tend to move beyond the dichotomous separation of I and the other and target the locus of the problem of entrapment in doctrines and institutions primarily with the individual. That is, they hold steadfast to the imperative that it is everyone’s responsibility and need to grow, whilst accepting also the conditions in which one is destined to do so. “Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events.”<sup>169</sup> Thus while the anarchist tends to look outside to find blame, point the finger, and criticize, the libertarian generally looks inside, accepting himself and the environment as it is. We can see that this way of being is nothing less than living in

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<sup>168</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Compensation”, p. 63

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, “Self-Reliance”, p. 24

concordance with the ancient Taoist principle of wu-wei, of non-action, that is not interfering with the natural process of growth.

However, the notion of the driving force of anarchy to break free from old structures, to dissolve the governments, to liberate, is in a spiritual sense or meaning of the word, extremely helpful and inspiring in the process of authentication: thus, metaphorically speaking, spiritual anarchy means the dissolution of replete internal governments. it is the breaking up of old habitual patterns of thinking, a gradual and courageous dismantling of obsolete concepts.

But if the soul is quick and strong, it bursts over that boundary on all sides, and expands another orbit on the great deep, which also runs up into a high wave, with attempt again to stop and to bind. But the heart refuses to be imprisoned; in its first and narrowest pulse it already tends outward, with a vast force, and to immense and innumerable expansions.<sup>170</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, Emerson uses the driving force of anarchy to expand consciousness and deepen the moment-by-moment experience of reality for when we are completely present, we experience the higher order of the universe as described in the ‘transparent eyeball’ experience.

### 5.5.2 Declarations of Independence - “I Unsettle All Things”

In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of experiencing truth as a witnessing of the unity of all things, a joining back of the fragmented mind, an experiencing of love for all human-kind by fully realizing and experiencing the life force to be flowing one and the same throughout all, to the effect, that it may seem unconceivable and well nigh impossible. Yet as the anarchists proclaimed, let us demand the impossible and see the scrupulous measure of self-discipline the examined life demands to usher forth the individual beyond the limits of conception and the torrents of one’s mind. Emerson declares:

...let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as

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<sup>170</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Circles” p. 147

true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back.<sup>171</sup>

Here we have Emerson's proclamation of independence as bold as ever. It is independence from struggles with the past and future, independence from the dichotomy of intellect and emotion, good and bad, true and false, sacred and profane. The tension of polarity is so tight, Emerson must have observed, that any classification, any name given, even for an intensely felt truth, may change character before one can even utter one's judgment of it. Yes, things are dual in nature, but the realization of the essential fluidity and oneness of the world becomes essentially a release:

In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.<sup>172</sup>

Life thus lived is a never-endingly expanding and evolving miracle and "man is a golden impossibility", for "the line he must walk is a hair breadth."<sup>173</sup> Not only is there ever a new deep to expand onto, but the way to follow steadfast to the line is no easy task.

In the process and journey of self-authentication, reclaiming a mind of integrity is of a paramount importance: the goal is to muster up the strength and courage of character to deal and do-away with restriction and dependence, to the furthest extent possible, and thus mount a self-reliance and independence which form the stepping stones to a freedom unparalleled, if truly conceived, as pertaining to the fact of the moment when the individual's feeling of separation and isolation has finally been fully and consciously transcended. Thus the essential characteristic of any noble moral or spiritual aspiration is to free oneself from the fetters of the tormented, complacent, fragmented and ignorant mind. For Emerson courage is essential:

And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not pinched in a corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but redeemers and benefactors, pious aspirants to be noble clay plastic under the Almighty effort, let us advance and advance on Chaos and the Dark.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *Essays and Poems*, "Circles", p. 154

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, "Experience", p. 213

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, "Self-Reliance", p. 24

Advancing on and on Chaos and Dark, Suzuki depicts the almighty effort which the individual must procure if he or she is to finally and truly reach the so yearned for bedrock of human condition:

Being so long accustomed to the oppression, the mental inertia becomes hard to remove. In fact it has gone down deep into the roots of our own being, and the whole structure of personality is to be overturned. The process of reconstruction is stained with tears and blood. But... the truth of Zen can never be attained unless it is attacked with the full force of personality. It is no pastime but the most serious task in life; no idlers will ever dare attempt it. It is indeed a moral anvil on which your character is hammered and hammered. To the question, "What is Zen?" a master gave this answer, "Boiling oil over a blazing fire." This scorching experience we have to go through with before Zen smiles on us and says, "Here is your home."<sup>175</sup>

### 5. 5. 3 Awakening the Mind

"The only sin is limitation"<sup>176</sup>, Emerson tells us in "Circles". Despite the deep inherent potential of humanity, man does not lead his life to the great promise of self-authentication. We lack the confidence and trust in ourselves, our lives seem trivial and superficial. The problem is that our core being is unconscious and our mind is asleep, fragmented and divided, subject to endless illusions and inertia; Emerson writes in "Experience":

But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands by the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noon-day. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, at night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glimmer. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghost-like we glide through nature, and should not know our place again.<sup>177</sup>

Emerson was well aware of the basic human limitations; in fact, this represents the core message of his, perhaps the most somber, essay "Experience". According to Emerson, we live in a biological prison, in a nightmare of "a sty of sensualism"<sup>178</sup>, confined by inherited predispositions and limited by the laws of the natural world. "We are confined, then, by combination of choice, physiology and circumstance, all operating in natural law." The crucial question is how do we deal with the ignorance, inertia, lassitude, lethargy, distractions and dissipations and self-deceptions that our mind is too often a subject to? Or in Emerson's words,

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<sup>175</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*, p. 22

<sup>176</sup> *Essays and Poems*, "Circles", p. 149

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, "Experience", p. 202

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207

“how long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines, laughter, and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance?”<sup>179</sup> How do we awaken and achieve that Emersonian ideal, the mind of integrity? Essentially, according to Emerson, it is a dire necessity that we commit to the individual responsibility for awakening and use our powerful minds to look inside at any given moment, that is, here and now, in the glorious present moment wherein lies the truth: “We must set up the strong present tense against all the rumours of wrath, past or to come.”<sup>180</sup>

According to Geldard, to achieve the integrity of mind “we always begin with the instrument we know the best: our own. For obvious reasons the first step in this process is an awareness that the process wants to take place. In other words, the individual has to make a conscious step in the direction of transformation.”<sup>181</sup> A prime example of such an aspirant towards awakening is Henry David Thoreau who in a conscious endeavor set out to Walden Pond to practice what Emerson had taught and who played out the intellectually and spiritually sophisticated insights of Emerson into the practical experience of everyday living and being. Hence it is to Thoreau the last chapter of this work is devoted; his insistence on a simple and fulfilling life, bereft of materialistic concerns and hindrances, in complete harmony with nature, made him a somber example and inspiration for the generations of activists, deep ecologists and philosophers to come.

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<sup>179</sup> *Essays and Poems*, “Experience”, p. 220

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, “Experience”, p. 212

<sup>181</sup> *The Spiritual Teachings*, p. 165



## CHAPTER SIX: THOREAU: LIFE OF INTEGRITY

### 6.1 *Walden, or Life in the Woods* - the Ultimate Affirmation of Life

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear, nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut broad-swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.<sup>182</sup>

In this famous passage of his book Henry David Thoreau states his personal motives for going into the woods, confessing his need to live the life which is purely genuine. He comes to the woods as a student and lover of nature, eager to be inspired. He passionately revolts against mere mechanical survival; rejecting all conventional forms of existence, he refuses to live by materialistic values and calls for new modes of thinking, perceiving and understanding. Like the ancient philosophers before him, he believes in simplifying his life in order to get in touch with the core of his being: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail."<sup>183</sup> Like Emerson, he believes in every man's 'genius', that is the inherent creative potential in everyone and in everyone's ultimate responsibility to search for it. As a part of his personal quest Thoreau builds a cabin by Walden Pond and chooses to live alone in the woods, simply and naturally, in close contact and harmony with nature, untouched by materialistic pursuits or demands of society. He hopes to transcend time by living fully in the present moment. In fact, what Thoreau describes in *Walden* is the ideal contemplative life of an individual on the path towards liberation.

*Walden* is a remarkable mixture of truth and fiction, of personal contemplation and public appeal, of meditation and oration. The tone is often meditative, as if the author were talking to himself, at times very eloquent, persuasive and argumentative when addressing his readers. It is

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<sup>182</sup> H. D. Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, pp. 172-173

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173

written in the form of an autobiography, yet from what we know of Thoreau's life, his day-to-day existence during the Walden experiment does not seem to be significantly altered from his life before or after. Thoreau was obviously no hermit living in the wilderness and solitude; he writes himself that Walden Pond was "only about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord"<sup>184</sup> – practically at his mother's house doorsteps and conveniently close to her kitchen. We know that Thoreau was both, a naturalist and a writer – for whom the processes of writing and experiencing were closely connected and reciprocal: "It is always remembered of Thoreau that he required a daily walk of at least four hours 'sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements'... It is not always recalled that he spent at least that much time every day at his desk, reading and writing"<sup>185</sup>, writes Robert Richardson in the intellectual biography of Henry Thoreau *A Life of the Mind*. Thus we can safely presume that Thoreau's daily habits remained essentially the same whether living in Concord or at Walden.

Thoreau's move to Walden was partly practical, partly symbolical. It is probably true that Thoreau did achieve a certain amount of independence and autonomy by living in the woods; by living simply, he was able to provide himself with the "gross necessities of life"<sup>186</sup> at a relatively easy cost; yet most importantly of all, he was able to find a beautiful and quiet place where, surrounded by nature, he could live, write and think in peace and carried out, what he called, "the experiment of living"<sup>187</sup> because he did see it as symbolic and representative of an ideal life for himself. Richardson writes: "Thoreau was well aware that what he was doing was not braving wilderness, but simulating its conditions in a sort of symbolic or laboratory experiment."<sup>188</sup> His sojourn at Walden thus becomes a symbolic expression of a true authentic experience and a perfect balance between intellectual and natural living, translated into the novel. Moreover, *Walden* can be seen as an outcome of Thoreau's personal evolution over the many years spent thinking, writing, walking, experiencing and blundering. The book, having originated in his journals, developed together with the author and was changed and perfected through seven various drafts over the period of nine years, with each successive draft capturing Thoreau's altering experience and expanding consciousness. Thoreau's work on *Walden* recalls his own story of a Kouroo artist, striving after perfection, which provides an interesting parallel of a story

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<sup>184</sup> *Walden*, p. 169

<sup>185</sup> Robert Richardson, *A Life of the Mind*, p. ix

<sup>186</sup> *Walden*, p. 113

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143

<sup>188</sup> *A Life of the Mind*, p. 153

within a story; *Walden*, just like the artist's staff, was smoothed and polished to perfection until in its process it transcended time and became immortal. Hence, it could be said that *Walden* is an expression of Thoreau's life-long work and spiritual development, rather than a product of the two-year experience at the pond. Yet, at the same time, it needs to be considered as primarily a work of fiction where the 'I' becomes inevitably fictionalized and where the author becomes the protagonist of his own novel. The drama enacted here is the drama of awakening, recognition and contemplation. Consequently, Walden Pond, the surrounding woods and Thoreau's dwelling function as the setting of the drama and the whole Walden experience represents the metaphor of the individual uniqueness and authenticated form of being.

Throughout the book Thoreau deliberately and purposefully provokes, mystifies and stirs up his readers by challenging conventional ways of thinking and tries to awaken in everyone that sense of responsibility for one's internal, deliberately mindful existence: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as a chanticleer in the morning, standing on its roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."<sup>189</sup> According to Thoreau, it is important to first change the way of thinking, to reshape one's consciousness in order to live "a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust"<sup>190</sup> and for that one does not need much money. In the chapter "Economy" he takes great pains to demonstrate the importance of learning what "the gross necessities of life"<sup>191</sup> are and how little we actually need for our physical survival. Nonetheless, *Walden* is not an instruction manual how to live one's life. Thoreau himself points this out very early in the book: "I would not have anyone adopt my mode of living on any account" and he makes it clear that anyone trying to follow his example would be totally missing the whole point of self-exploration: "I would have each one to be very careful to find out and pursue *his own way*, and not his mother's or his neighbor's instead."<sup>192</sup> Each human life is a highly personal and unique matter and possibilities are infinite: "there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one center."<sup>193</sup>

Near the beginning of *Walden* Thoreau states that his purpose in his going to the woods was "not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but transact some private business with the

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<sup>189</sup> *Walden*, p. 109

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113

fewest obstacles.”<sup>194</sup> What was this private business of Henry Thoreau? He answers this himself in his journal: “I wish to meet the facts of life – the vital facts, which were the phenomena or actuality the Gods meant to show us, - face to face, And so I came down here. Life! Who knows what it is - what it does?”<sup>195</sup> What Thoreau aimed for was to live a life which would be uniquely and authentically his own. Thoreau’s famous imperative “Explore thyself” represents the highest law of one’s being, which automatically “place(s) one’s self in formal opposition to the most sacred laws of society.”<sup>196</sup> In his letter to Blake Thoreau writes in a similar vein, ever emphasizing the importance of self-searching and connecting with one’s higher nature: “Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still. Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not *simply* good – be good for something.”<sup>197</sup> By coming to live to Walden Thoreau deliberately and symbolically puts himself into the opposition by refusing to conform to society and live like everyone else. Being an eccentric, rebel and non-conformist all his life, he is obviously a self-reliant individual, the man who “hears a different drummer”, and therefore, chooses not to “keep pace with his companions.”<sup>198</sup> Consequently, in Walden Thoreau makes his business to express his deliberate nonconformity to society and to be himself, that is, commit and devote himself to writing, observing and experiencing Nature – the occupations that satisfy his soul the most. However, it should be stressed here that by coming to live to Walden Thoreau did not mean to isolate himself from society: “Thoreau’s venture was in no sense a retreat or withdrawal. He himself thought of it as a step forward, a liberation, a new beginning, or as he put it in the second chapter of *Walden*, an awakening to what is real and important in life.”<sup>199</sup>

## 6.2 In Tune with Nature

Nature plays a central role in Thoreau’s life; his relationship to her can be described as deeply spiritual, physical as well as emotional. Nature becomes his essential subject matter for

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<sup>194</sup> *Walden*, p. 119

<sup>195</sup> Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal*, quoted in *A Life of Mind*, p. 153

<sup>196</sup> *Walden*, p. 342

<sup>197</sup> *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, quoted in *A Life of the Mind*, p. 188

<sup>198</sup> *Walden*, p. 345

<sup>199</sup> *A Life of the Mind*, p. 153

through her he finds his authentic mode of being; she is his inspiration, nurturing the body and soul: “What Nature is to the mind she is also to the body. As she feeds my imagination, she will feed my body”<sup>200</sup>, writes Henry Thoreau in yet another letter to Blake. Thoreau perceives nature as “an ocean of subtile intelligences”, the source of all wisdom and “the perennial source of our life.”<sup>201</sup> It was once said about Thoreau that he had “experienced Nature as other men are said to experience religion”<sup>202</sup> and the following paragraph is a perfect illustration of the fact:

I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very patterning of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was distinctly aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.<sup>203</sup>

Thoreau believes that nature is a primary teacher of courage and freedom; all these concepts are in *Walden* intricately connected and reciprocal: in order to live the life in harmony with nature, one needs to learn to have courage to be truly free to lead the life one has chosen. The individual experience of nature is of vital importance in the quest for personal liberation and spiritual awakening. For Thoreau the experience of experiencing nature represents the process of ultimate self-discovery. His *Walden* experiment symbolically expresses the need for freedom, courage, and the unity of mind in order to avoid the life of despair. Thus the dominant theme of the life and work of Henry Thoreau becomes the symbiosis of Man and Nature, the reciprocal relationship between the subjective and objective, the intellectual and emotional, the spiritual and empirical. Thoreau writes in his journal:

...it is the marriage of the soul with Nature that makes the intellect fruitful, that gives birth to imagination. When we are dead and dry as the highway, some sense which has been healthily fed will put us in relation with Nature, in sympathy with her: some grains of fertilizing pollen, floating in the sky, fall on us, and suddenly the sky is all one rainbow, is full of music and fragrance and flavor.<sup>204</sup>

Being closely connected to Nature Thoreau always expressed himself – his feelings and emotions but also his physical well-being – in terms of seasons of the year; for example, spring

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<sup>200</sup> *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, quoted in *A Life of the Mind*, p. 188

<sup>201</sup> *Walden*, p. 204

<sup>202</sup> Quoted in *A Life of the Mind*, p. 193

<sup>203</sup> *Walden*, pp. 202-203

<sup>204</sup> Quoted in *A Life of the Mind*, p. 248

rejuvenated him but winter put him into decline. He stresses the importance of living in the present, one day at a time: “God himself culminates in the present moment”<sup>205</sup>, emphasizing the imperative of daily renewal and purification. He often uses natural images as spiritual symbols: thus, morning as well as the morning star becomes the primary metaphor of spiritual awakening:

Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. They say that characters were engraven on the bathing tub of king Tching-thang to this effect: “Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again.”<sup>206</sup>

The awakening metaphors in the chapter “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For” are remarkably beautiful and numerous. Thoreau draws extensively from perennial sources: “All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say: “All intelligences awake with the morning.”<sup>207</sup> He affirms that the fully authenticated and creative life is the only existence worth living and evokes the trust in the inherent individual potential to achieve liberation: “To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face? We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn...”<sup>208</sup> Richardson comments:

The experience of awakening is crucial. Thoreau’s language emphasizes renewal, reinvigoration, purification. Significantly, he does not use or suggest the language of redemption. The awakening he seeks is Greek, not Christian, and certainly not Puritan. No hint of Calvinist revival is intended or allowed. The awakening is a religious experience in the broad sense of the word, and the language turns to Hindu, Chinese, and above all Greek religion to the pointed exclusion of Christianity.<sup>209</sup>

Similarly, Thoreau’s God is not Christian but is remarkably like Tao, the all-encompassing principle, whose emanation flows throughout the universe; it is like the all-embracing Buddha consciousness, it is like the ‘pneuma’ of the Stoics – immanent in all created things. Thoreau might not have read Lao Tzu, or known anything about Zen but the fact is, he was definitely well versed in Stoic philosophy. However, according to Richardson, “despite the fact that he had read other Stoic writers – Cicero, Seneca, Persius – and despite an early journal

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<sup>205</sup> *Walden.*, p. 177

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p 171

<sup>207</sup> *Vishnu Purana*, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 172

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *A Life of the Mind*, p. 174

entry on Zeno which starts ‘Zeno the stoic stood in precisely the same relation to the world that I do now,’ despite these and other traces Greek and Roman Stoicism in Thoreau, his Stoicism was not derivative in any important way. As has been said so often, he had a genius for living out what others only speculated about.” The poet Ellery Channing, Thoreau’s good friend and frequent companion on his walks, observed that Thoreau was a natural Stoic “not taught from Epictetus”<sup>210</sup>. Rather than a question of influence, Richardson suggests, it was perhaps more a matter of “spiritual affinity” as Emerson would say, of great minds running parallel to each other.

But wherever it came from (and why should we utterly rule out the classics?) the habitual center of Thoreau’s personal energy certainly included some major Stoic perceptions. His thought has a strong ethical center – he aimed, early and late, to find a firm support for the moral life in the ordinary nature of man himself. His was always the practical question, how best can I live my daily life? Then too, Thoreau is probably the greatest spokesman of the last two hundred years for the view that we must turn not to the state, not to a God, and not to society, but to nature for our morality. He also stands as the most attractive American *example* – as Emerson was the great proponent – of the ageless stoic principle of self-trust, self-reverence, or self-reliance, as it is variously called. Thoreau’s life can be thought of as one long uninterrupted attempt to work out the practical concrete meaning of the meaning of the Stoic idea that the laws ruling nature rule men as well.<sup>211</sup>

### 6. 3 The Legacy of *Walden*

*Walden* concludes with a hope. The story of the New England “strong and beautiful bug” represents an allegory of mankind which, having been “buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society”<sup>212</sup>, is finally able to break through the resignation and desperation and overcome the stupor and alienation in the world. The miraculous resurrection of the bug reflects Thoreau’s faith in the ultimate human liberation and *Walden* ends with an affirmation of life and the promise of a glorious future, in which mankind will be able to awake to its great creative potential and attain the superior life granted by Nature.

In the following quote, Richardson emphasizes how Thoreau’s notion of self-reliance and supreme self-authentication helped shape Gandhi’s future ideal of an India ruled by the peoples themselves:

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<sup>210</sup> *A Life of the Mind*, p. 174

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191

<sup>212</sup> *Walden*, p. 350

*Walden* modernizes and extends the idea of freedom by reviving the classical, Stoic emphasis on autarky or self-rule, by domesticating into an American context the Hindu concept of the “final liberation” of the spirit, and by equating freedom with wildness [Thoreau] understood to be the source and raw material of all civilization and culture. Thoreau thus transcends what is often said of the Hindu tradition, that the quest for an exclusively inner freedom can lead to acquiescence in outward tyranny. He links, in his life and in his writing, the idea of the free autonomous individual, and the individual taking his stand in the world, marching to a different drummer perhaps, but marching all the same. India in [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century has taken back its own tradition improved and made practicable by Thoreau. Gandhi, drawing explicitly on Thoreau, could say in his treatise on *Indian Home Rule*, “Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control... If man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man’s tyranny will enslave him. This is the key to self-rule or home-rule.”<sup>213</sup>

#### 6. 4 “In Wildness is the Preservation of the World”

Only now is the full significance of his philosophical achievement being recognized. Thoreau’s 1851 statement “In wildness is the preservation of the world” provides the basis for modern ecocentric environmentalism. Concerning the philosophy of the wild that Thoreau developed throughout the 1850s, Roderick Nash (in *The Rights of Nature*) comments that “such ideas are totally remarkable for their total absence in previous American thought... Thoreau was not only unprecedented in these ideas, he was virtually alone in holding them.”<sup>214</sup>

George Sessions discusses the importance of Thoreau in his essay “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour” and states: “As a result of recent scholarship, Henry David Thoreau is now recognized as the great ecocentric philosopher of the nineteenth century.”<sup>215</sup> Perhaps not many read Thoreau’s books for pleasure today but he has a definite and stable place in the university textbooks of Ecology and Environmental studies. He is steadily acknowledged as one of the philosophical forefathers of Deep Ecology movement, along with John Muir, D. H. Lawrence, Robinson Jeffers, and Aldous Huxley. Moreover, “in 1851, Henry David Thoreau made the radical and unprecedented statement “In wildness is the preservation of the world.” Thoreau also remarked that “all good things are wild and free.” These statements are increasingly being understood as the source of modern ecophilosophy and ecopsychology. They suggest that the

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<sup>213</sup> *A Life of the Mind*, p. 316

<sup>214</sup> George Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 165

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164



modernist project of domesticating human life and making it increasingly artificial and out of touch with the wild, is resulting in disaster. Not only must wild ecosystems, plants, and animals be protected”, writes George Sessions in *Deep Ecology* and emphasizes that what Thoreau in the essay “Walking” essentially refers to, is “the crucial importance of fostering *human wildness*.”<sup>216</sup>

The constant need for re-actualization of the self together with the inherent human potential for growth directly corresponds with and is reflected in the laws of nature whereby all things grow, expand, evolve, coalesce – instinctively, incessantly. The wildness within us, the metaphor of inner freedom which enables us to live fully, consciously the life of integrity, represents the core message pervading throughout Thoreau’s writings and this legacy is consistently relevant, vital and urgent to us today, in our times as much as it was in his.

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<sup>216</sup> George Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 325

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion – what is anarchy but a vindication to rule by one's own power, to serve oneself and others to freedom in the best way fathomable? All imposed authority is after all ludicrous, for the whole macrocosm beams from within the individual – the microcosm, where the freedom to explore, develop, learn and grow rests firmly as a foundation of being and is essentially what all anarchists and libertarians insistently observed, studied and taught throughout the ages. Whether Stoics, Zen Buddhists, Transcendentalists – all grasp the fullness and potential of being alive, open, receptive and restful in the face of change and necessity. The cosmos, we may with libertarian lenses observe, cannot be explained away with logical reductionisms, or speculative spiritual doctrines – it needs to be felt reverberating through the whole being with passion, awe and sincerity. The values of love, compassion and ecstasy form the stepping stones of ascending path of humanity to meet the divine, celestial, the all, the chi, the eternal abyss, the source, the sacred and profound depth of reality – permeating all and in every degree. It is thus an eternal question which challenges and invites human beings in perilous and playful ways to investigate, examine and experience life in all its aspects and see whether such experiments can be validated in the face of an insistent and incessant evolution.

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